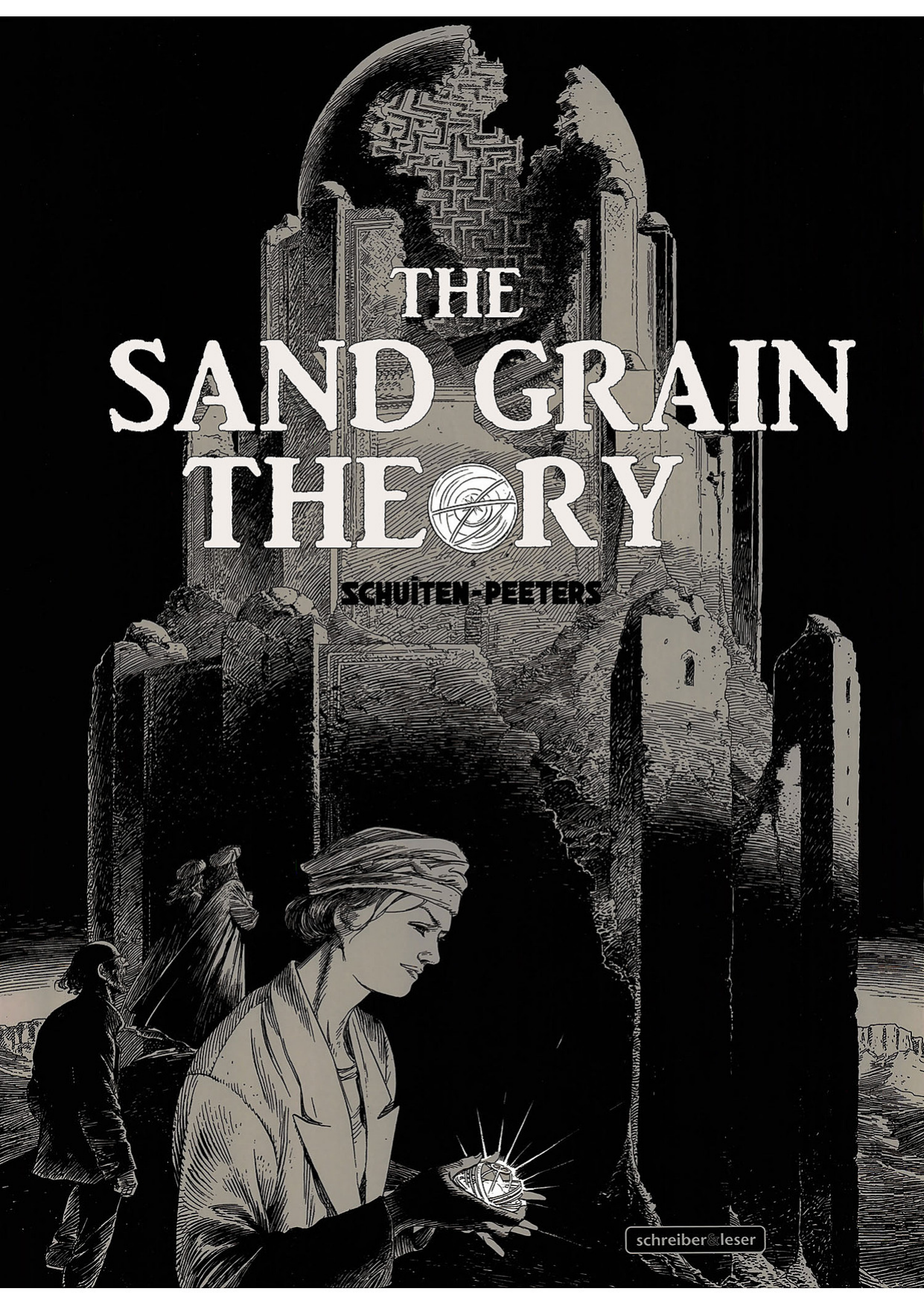
THE
SAND GRAIN
THEORY
SCHUITEN-PEETERS
schreiber&leser

The Authors would like to thank:

Cécile Jodogne
Alain Goffin
Eric de Kuyper
Victor Starquit
Claude Diouri

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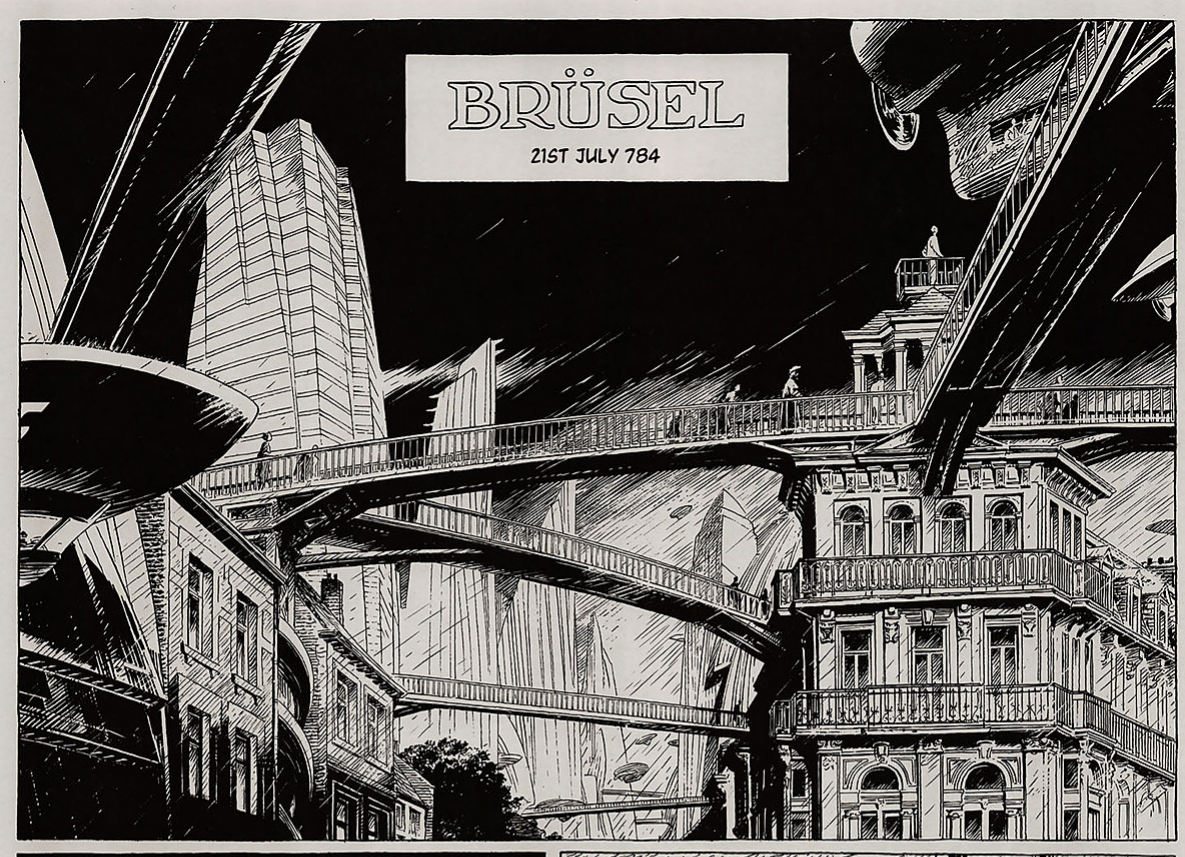
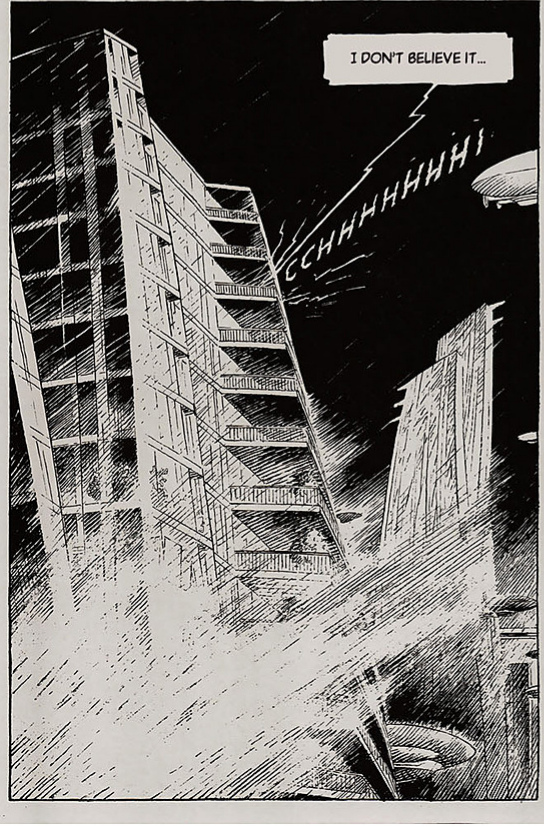
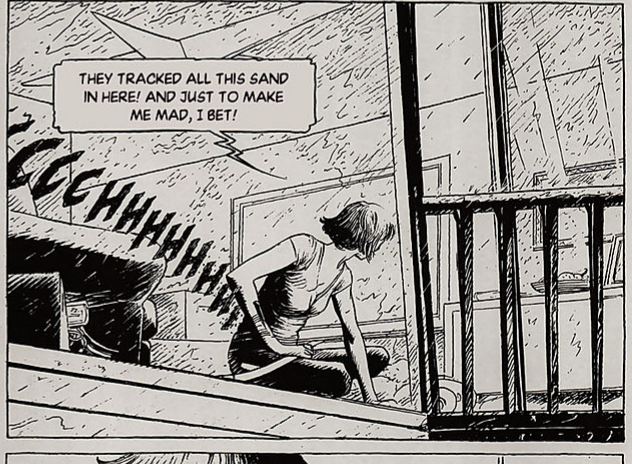
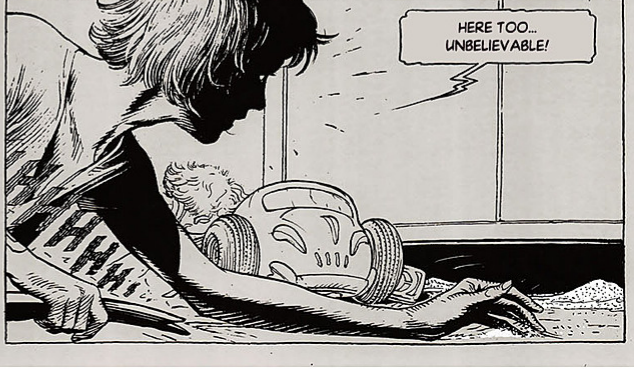
Titel der Originalausgabe: LA THÉORIE DU GRAIN DE SABLE
Aus dem Französischen von Resel Rebiersch

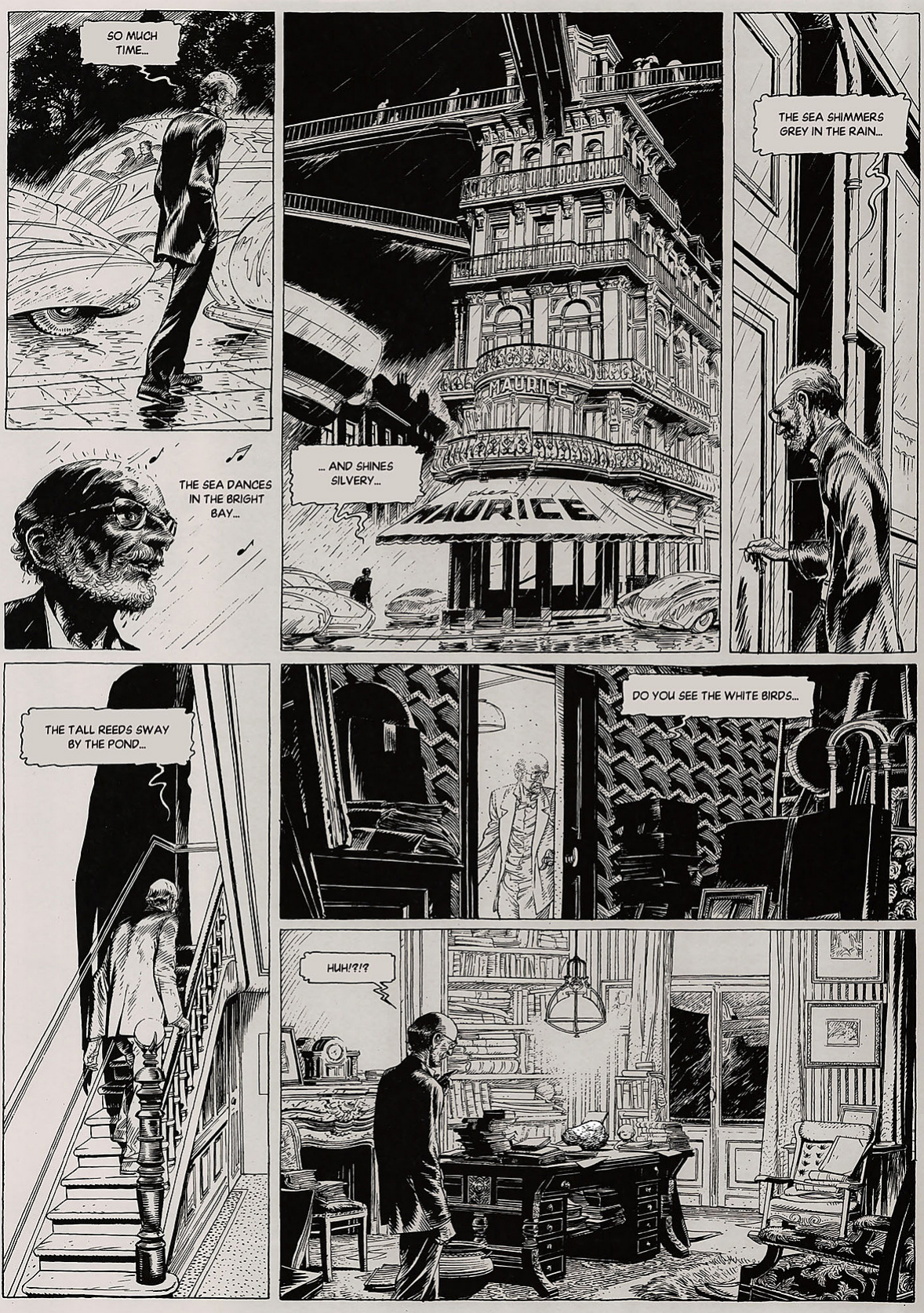

BRÜSEL
21ST JULY 784


I DON'T BELIEVE IT...
CCHHHHHHHH!


THEY TRACKED ALL THIS SAND IN HERE! AND JUST TO MAKE ME MAD, I BET!
CCHHHHHH!

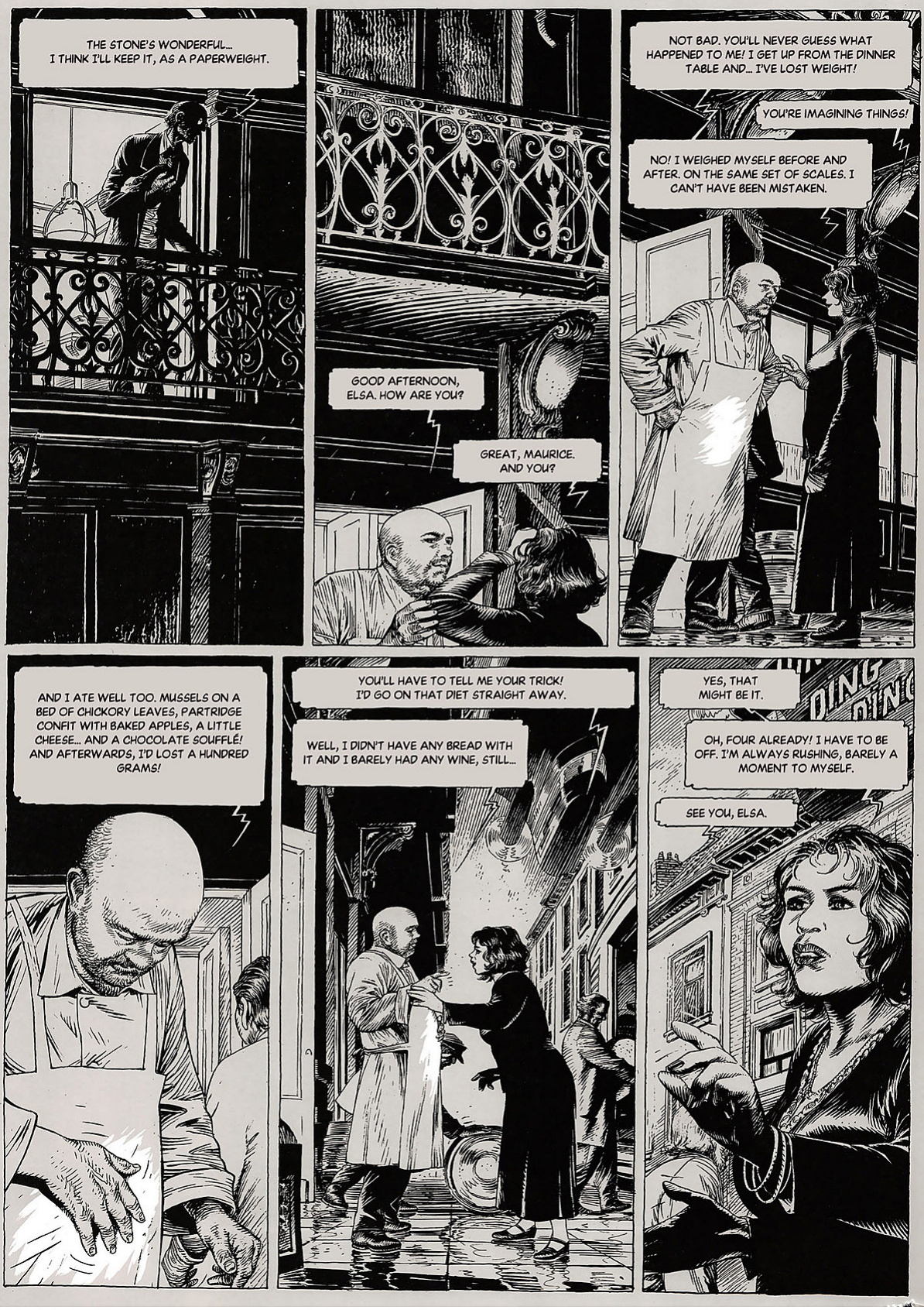

HERE TOO... UNBELIEVABLE!
HHH!

-GCHHHHKK-
IT'S ALL OVER THE PLACE... HOW DID THEY DO THIS? THOSE KIDS'LL GET AN EARFUL!
AS IF I DIDN'T HAVE ANYTHING BETTER TO DO!
FFF... I'VE HAD ENOUGH...
AND IT'LL NEVER ALL FIT IN THE BIN.
HELLO, NEIGHBOUR, HOW ARE YOU?
HELLO. GOOD, THANKS.


SO MUCH TIME...
THE SEA DANCES IN THE BRIGHT BAY...
... AND SHINES SILVERY...
MAURICE
THE SEA SHIMMERS GREY IN THE RAIN...
THE TALL REEDS SWAY BY THE POND...
DO YOU SEE THE WHITE BIRDS...
HUH!?!?

THAT'S STRANGE... VERY STRANGE...
WHERE DID THIS STONE COME FROM?
NOTHING ELSE IS OUT OF PLACE.
THE DOOR WASN'T FORCED.
THE BALCONY DOOR'S LOCKED. NO-ONE GOT IN THAT WAY.
AH, IT'S STOPPED RAINING.

GOOD AFTERNOON, MADAME ANTIPOVA. YOU'VE CERTAINLY GOT A LOAD THERE.
GOOD AFTERNOON, UH... MONSIEUR ABEELS.
CAN I HELP YOU? I'M USED TO HEAVY LIFTING...
BUT IT'S REALLY HEAVY!
YES, YOU'RE RIGHT... BUT TOGETHER IT MIGHT BE EASIER.
DO YOU HAVE A SANDBOX IN YOUR APARTMENT OR SOMETHING?
ABSOLUTELY NOT, I...
EXCUSE ME, THAT WASN'T VERY TACTFUL.
WE'LL PUT IT IN THE BUSHES HERE.
UH... DON'T YOU THINK...
NO, NO, IT WON'T DO THE PLANTS ANY HARM.
WELL, THANK YOU, THAT WAS VERY KIND OF YOU.
THINK NOTHING OF IT, NEIGHBOURS SHOULD STICK TOGETHER. AND I DO HAVE A LOT OF FREE TIME NOW.


THE STONE'S WONDERFUL... I THINK I'LL KEEP IT, AS A PAPERWEIGHT.
GOOD AFTERNOON, ELSA. HOW ARE YOU?
GREAT, MAURICE. AND YOU?
NOT BAD. YOU'LL NEVER GUESS WHAT HAPPENED TO ME! I GET UP FROM THE DINNER TABLE AND... I'VE LOST WEIGHT!
YOU'RE IMAGINING THINGS!
NO! I WEIGHED MYSELF BEFORE AND AFTER. ON THE SAME SET OF SCALES. I CAN'T HAVE BEEN MISTAKEN.
AND I ATE WELL TOO. MUSSELS ON A BED OF CHICKORY LEAVES, PARTRIDGE CONFIT WITH BAKED APPLES, A LITTLE CHEESE... AND A CHOCOLATE SOUFFLÉ! AND AFTERWARDS, I'D LOST A HUNDRED GRAMS!
YOU'LL HAVE TO TELL ME YOUR TRICK! I'D GO ON THAT DIET STRAIGHT AWAY.
WELL, I DIDN'T HAVE ANY BREAD WITH IT AND I BARELY HAD ANY WINE, STILL...
YES, THAT MIGHT BE IT.
DING DING
OH, FOUR ALREADY! I HAVE TO BE OFF. I'M ALWAYS RUSHING, BARELY A MOMENT TO MYSELF.
SEE YOU, ELSA.

THERE YOU ARE MADAME, FINALLY.
I'M LATE, I KNOW... AND ALL OUT OF BREATH. I RUSHED HERE AS FAST AS I COULD.

I SHOWED THAT... MAN INTO THE SMOKING ROOM. WAS I RIGHT TO..?
YES, YES, LEONIE, QUITE RIGHT.

!?

GOOD AFTERNOON... WE DON'T KNOW EACH OTHER, I PRESUME.
NO, MY LADY.
I-I SPOKE WITH MONSIEUR ASHTON, HE...

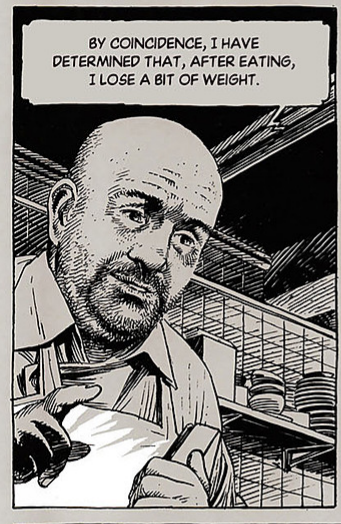
UNFORTUNATELY I HAD TO COME PERSONALLY. THE TIME FOR GO-BETWEENS IS OVER.

MY NAME IS GHOLAM MORTIZA KHAN.
ELSA AUTRIQUE, GOOD AFTERNOON. FORGIVE MY LATENESS.
FOR US BUGTI WARRIORS THERE IS NO TOO EARLY OR TOO LATE.
AHA... I SEE. YOU MUST HAVE HAD A LONG JOURNEY, MONSIEUR... KHAN... IS THIS YOUR FIRST TIME IN BRÜSEL?
YES. I ARRIVED THIS MORNING.
SHALL WE SIT AT THE TABLE? A CUP OF TEA PERHAPS? OR... SOMETHING ELSE?
I AM ANXIOUS TO SEE YOUR TREASURES... I LOVE BUGTI ART SO.
BUT SADLY, IN THESE TIMES...
PLEASE, TAKE A SEAT...
THEY SAY A LOT OF BUSINESS GOES THROUGH YOU... THEY ALSO SAY YOU KNOW OF THE WHOLE WORLD.
WELL... THAT'S A BIT OF AN EXAGGERATION, BUT...
OH YES, THEY'RE WONDERFUL. BUT NOT QUITE WHAT I'M LOOKING FOR. THEY'RE A LITTLE TOO LARGE.

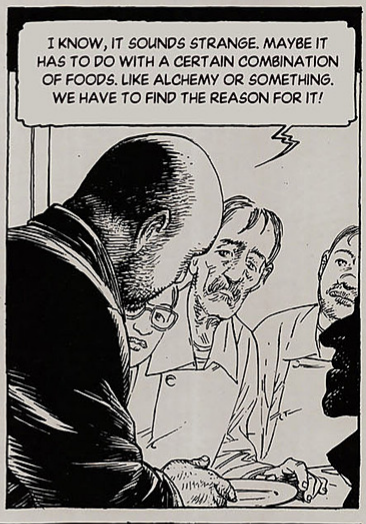
THEY ARE INTERESTING. BUT YOU KNOW, THE MARKET IS MORE DIFFICULT THAN IT WAS TWO YEARS AGO... FASHION CHANGES SO QUICKLY.
I UNDERSTAND.
BUT THAT PIECE IS LOVELY. I'LL BUY IT FROM YOU FOR A GOOD PRICE.
THIS IS NOT JEWELLERY.
AND WHERE DOES IT COME FROM, IF I MAY ASK? A FAMILY HEIRLOOM?
IT IS WAR BOOTY. THE CHIEF OF THE MOKTAR WORE IT AROUND HIS NECK.
I WILL NEVER SELL IT. THAT WOULD BE BETRAYING MY BLOOD.
UH... YES... OF COURSE... I UNDERSTAND.
BUT MAYBE YOU COULD LEND IT TO ME... FOR TWO OR THREE DAYS. IT MIGHT INSPIRE MY GOLDSMITHS.
I'D GLADLY BUY ANOTHER SET OF JEWELLERY FROM YOU. MAYBE I COULD FIND SOME ADMIRERS AFTER ALL.

THANK YOU ONCE AGAIN. I'LL EXPECT YOU IN THREE DAYS, AT THIS TIME. I'LL GUARD IT WITH MY LIFE, I SWEAR IT!
AND IT'S NOT FAR TO THE PALACE OF THREE POWERS. JUST GO STRAIGHT ON, FOLLOW THE TRACKS.
RIGHT, HE'S GONE. IT WAS DRIVING ME MAD! IT'S ABSOLUTELY INCREDIBLE LEONIE!
BRING ME SOMETHING TO DRINK.
I HAVE IT... HE FINALLY GAVE IT TO ME... THIS MASTERPIECE!
I'VE NEVER SEEN ANYTHING SO BEAUTIFUL.

WAIT, DON'T START YET! I HAVE TO TELL YOU ALL SOMETHING... WE STAND AT THE CUSP OF A GREAT DISCOVERY.

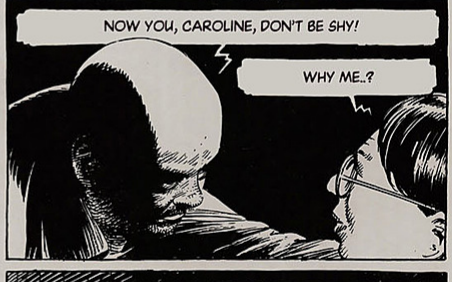

BY COINCIDENCE, I HAVE DETERMINED THAT, AFTER EATING, I LOSE A BIT OF WEIGHT.

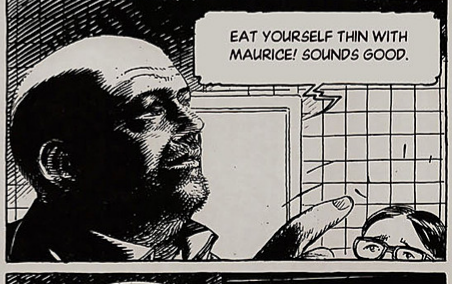
IS THAT TRUE, BOSS?
BUT THAT ISN'T POSSIBLE.

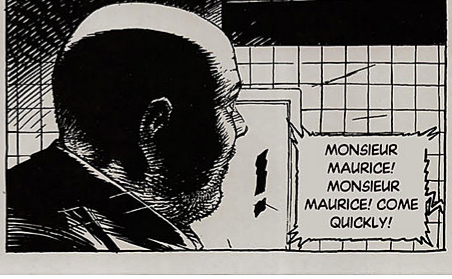

I KNOW, IT SOUNDS STRANGE. MAYBE IT HAS TO DO WITH A CERTAIN COMBINATION OF FOODS. LIKE ALCHEMY OR SOMETHING. WE HAVE TO FIND THE REASON FOR IT!

FROM NOW ON, YOU WILL ALL WEIGH YOURSELVES BEFORE AND AFTER EATING. WE NEED TO GO ABOUT THIS METHODICALLY.

NOW SEE, ANOTHER 500 GRAMS LOST!!


NOW YOU, CAROLINE, DON'T BE SHY!
WHY ME..?


EAT YOURSELF THIN WITH MAURICE! SOUNDS GOOD.


MONSIEUR MAURICE! MONSIEUR MAURICE! COME QUICKLY!

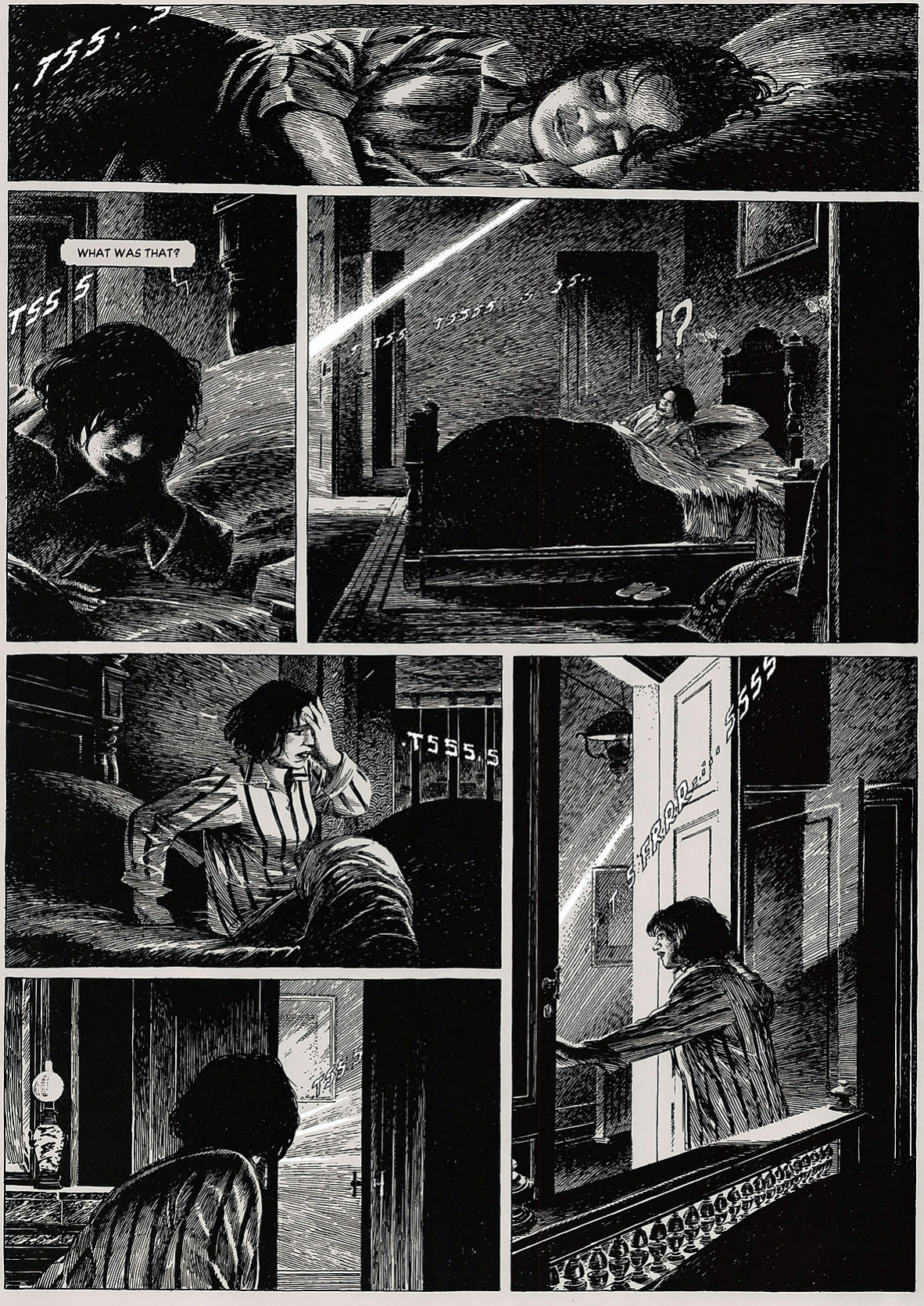
A TRAGIC ACCIDENT. RIGHT IN FRONT OF THE RESTAURANT! WE NEED A COVERING... A TABLECLOTH...
A SAVAGE... HE WAS WALKING RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF THE RAILS... THE DRIVER COULDN'T DO ANYTHING.
81
MAKE WAY!
81
I RANG MY BELL BUT... TOO LATE! IT'S AWFUL!
WHO KNOWS WHERE HE'S FROM...
HE DOESN'T HAVE ANY PAPERS.
COME ON, BACK TO WORK. STANDING AROUND HERE WON'T BRING HIM BACK EITHER.
SUCH A HANDSOME MAN... HOW SAD.
TO COME SO FAR AND THEN FALL UNDER A TRAM...

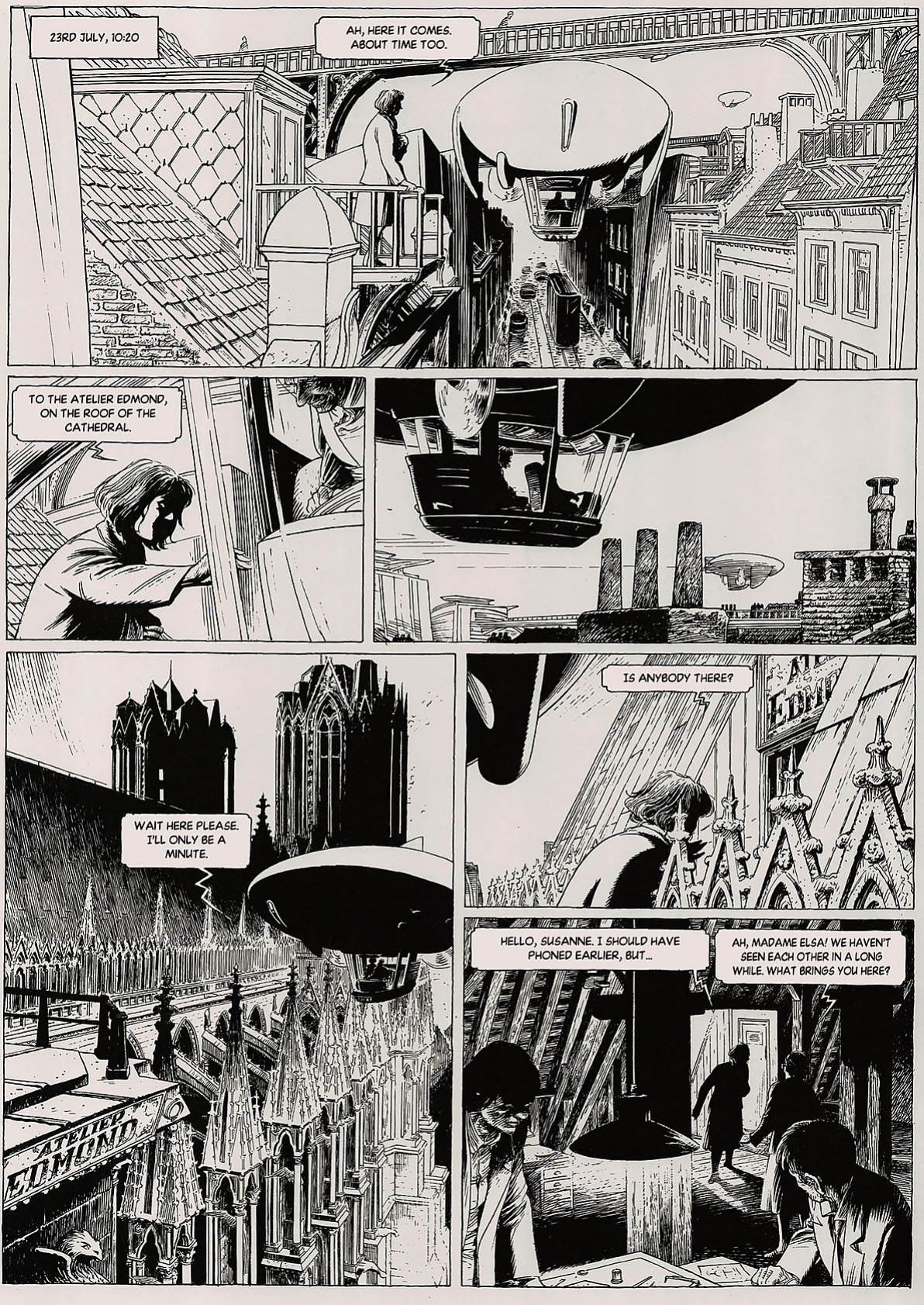
22ND JULY, 8:40
THE PAPER, MADAME.
THANK YOU, LEONIE.
MORNING POST
BRÜSEL
22ND JULY
TRAGIC ACCIDENT
STREET OF THREE POWERS
Do you know this man?
SCRATCH
CRRR

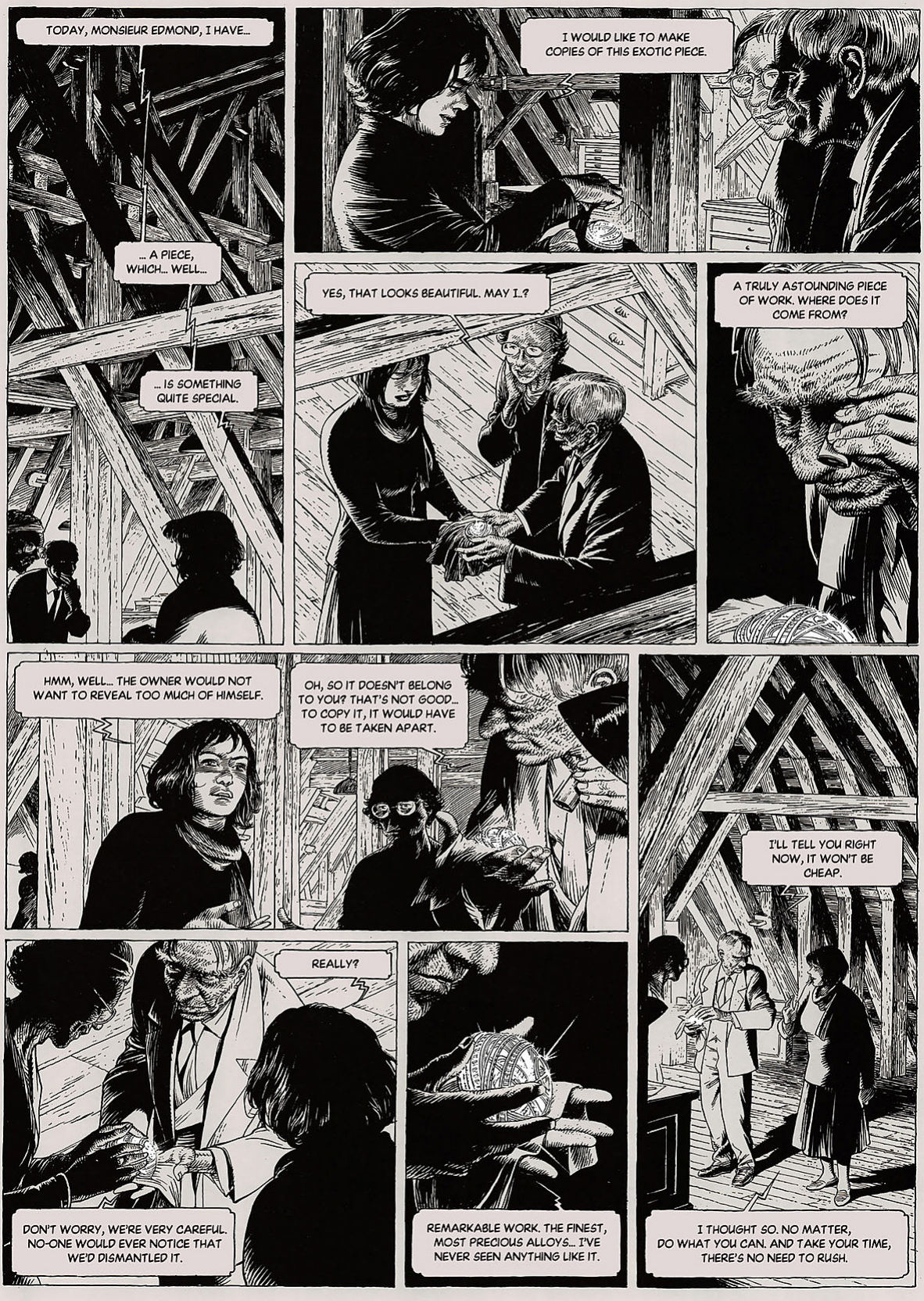
AH, THERE IT IS.
10:12
JUST LIKE THE OTHERS... JUST THE SAME SORT OF ROCK.
No. 7
22nd July, 10:1
Found behind a pile of books
I'D LIKE TO KNOW ITS WEIGHT... IT WOULD BE STRANGE IF...

OF COURSE THEY SAY IT WASN'T THEM. BUT WHO ELSE COULD IT HAVE BEEN?
OKAY, ONCE IS JUST A PRANK. BUT THEN TWICE MORE, THAT'S GOING TOO FAR!
BUT I GAVE THEM A GOOD TALKING TO. YOU COULDN'T EVER CALL ME A SOFT TOUCH!
REALLY, MONIQUE, ALL ALONE WITH THOSE TWO, DAY IN, DAY OUT, IT ISN'T EASY.
WHEN I THINK OF EVERYTHING MAURICE PROMISED ME, THE BASTARD... THAT HE'D ADOPT THEM AND EVERYTHING!
I WAS STUPID TO EVER TRUST HIM, JUST LIKE...
!?
OH, NO...
RRRRR
ER, I HAVE TO GO, MONIQUE... I'LL CALL YOU BACK...

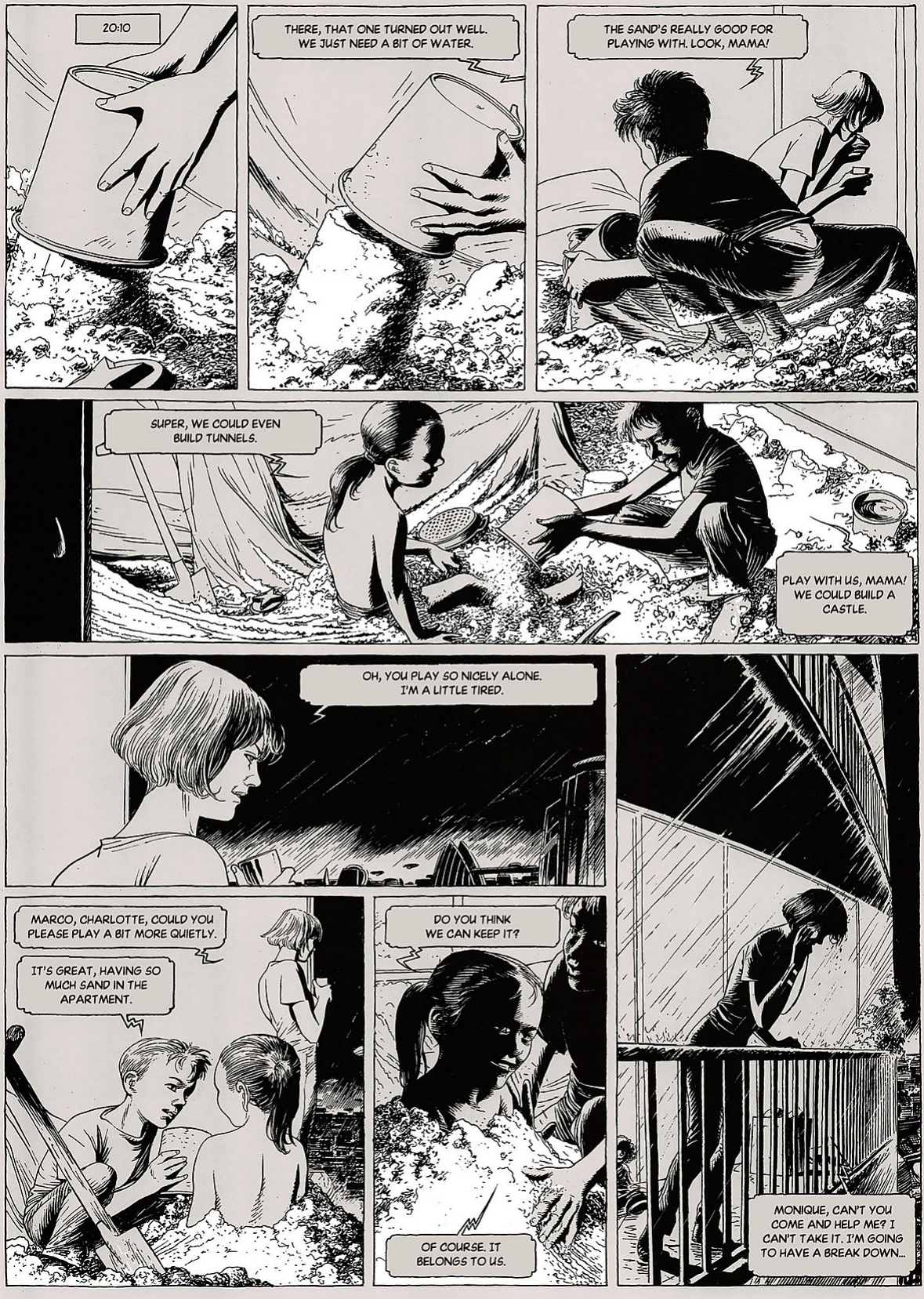
14:05
IN A MOMENT I'LL HAVE HAD IT UP TO HERE WITH WEIGHING!
6,793 GRAMS.
WHAT A STONE. PRETTY HEAVY.
EXACTLY THE SAME WEIGHT. I THOUGHT SO. NOW WE'LL WEIGH THE OTHER TO BE SURE. BUT I'M SURE, WE'RE...
YOU SEE. I SAID SO! THIS ONE WEIGHS 6,793 GRAMS TOO!
UNBELIEVABLE, THIS COINCIDENCE, SEE I ALSO HAVE A PROBLEM WITH WEIGHT.
DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT, IT'S COMPLETELY NORMAL IN YOUR LINE OF WORK.
NO, I'M GETTING LIGHTER.
WHAT, YOU'RE STARVING YOURSELF?
NOT EXACTLY. BUT I AM LOSING WEIGHT.
I THOUGHT I'D DISCOVERED A NEW DIET. MAYBE I HAVE, BUT IT'S MORE COMPLICATED THAN THAT. NONE OF MY COLLEAGUES HAVE LOST ANY WEIGHT, EVEN THOUGH THEY'RE EATING THE SAME AS I AM. OR EVEN LESS!
A PRIME NUMBER. I THOUGHT SO.
WHAT..?
6793 IS A PRIME NUMBER. NOW I UNDERSTAND WHY I NEEDED SUCH EXACT SCALES.
I THINK WE SHOULD BRACE OURSELVES FOR A FEW MORE SURPRISES, MAURICE.
A PRIME NUMBER... WHATEVER NEXT!


TSS...
WHAT WAS THAT?
TSS S
TSSSS
!?
TSSS.S
SHARR...
SSSS


23RD JULY, 10:20
AH, HERE IT COMES. ABOUT TIME TOO.
TO THE ATELIER EDMOND, ON THE ROOF OF THE CATHEDRAL.
WAIT HERE PLEASE. I'LL ONLY BE A MINUTE.
ATELIER EDMOND
IS ANYBODY THERE?
HELLO, SUSANNE. I SHOULD HAVE PHONED EARLIER, BUT...
AH, MADAME ELSA! WE HAVEN'T SEEN EACH OTHER IN A LONG WHILE. WHAT BRINGS YOU HERE?


TODAY, MONSIEUR EDMOND, I HAVE...
... A PIECE, WHICH... WELL...
... IS SOMETHING QUITE SPECIAL.
I WOULD LIKE TO MAKE COPIES OF THIS EXOTIC PIECE.
YES, THAT LOOKS BEAUTIFUL. MAY I..?
A TRULY ASTOUNDING PIECE OF WORK. WHERE DOES IT COME FROM?
HMM, WELL... THE OWNER WOULD NOT WANT TO REVEAL TOO MUCH OF HIMSELF.
OH, SO IT DOESN'T BELONG TO YOU? THAT'S NOT GOOD... TO COPY IT, IT WOULD HAVE TO BE TAKEN APART.
I'LL TELL YOU RIGHT NOW, IT WON'T BE CHEAP.
REALLY?
DON'T WORRY, WE'RE VERY CAREFUL. NO-ONE WOULD EVER NOTICE THAT WE'D DISMANTLED IT.
REMARKABLE WORK. THE FINEST, MOST PRECIOUS ALLOYS... I'VE NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE IT.
I THOUGHT SO. NO MATTER, DO WHAT YOU CAN. AND TAKE YOUR TIME, THERE'S NO NEED TO RUSH.

THAT CAN'T BE...

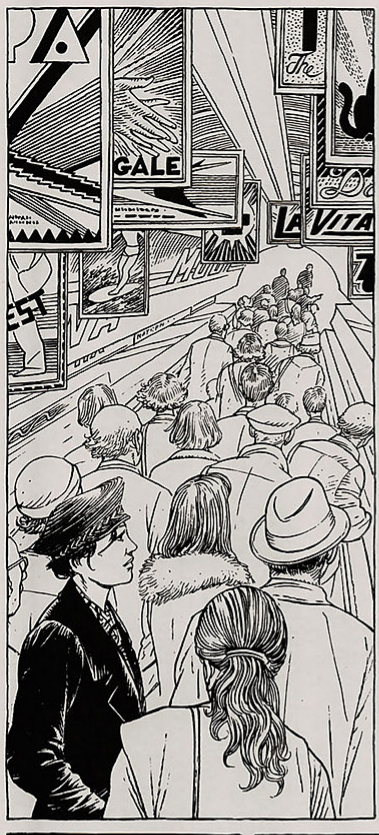

20:10
THERE, THAT ONE TURNED OUT WELL. WE JUST NEED A BIT OF WATER.
THE SAND'S REALLY GOOD FOR PLAYING WITH. LOOK, MAMA!
SUPER, WE COULD EVEN BUILD TUNNELS.
PLAY WITH US, MAMA! WE COULD BUILD A CASTLE.
OH, YOU PLAY SO NICELY ALONE. I'M A LITTLE TIRED.
MARCO, CHARLOTTE, COULD YOU PLEASE PLAY A BIT MORE QUIETLY.
IT'S GREAT, HAVING SO MUCH SAND IN THE APARTMENT.
DO YOU THINK WE CAN KEEP IT?
OF COURSE. IT BELONGS TO US.
MONIQUE, CAN'T YOU COME AND HELP ME? I CAN'T TAKE IT. I'M GOING TO HAVE A BREAK DOWN...

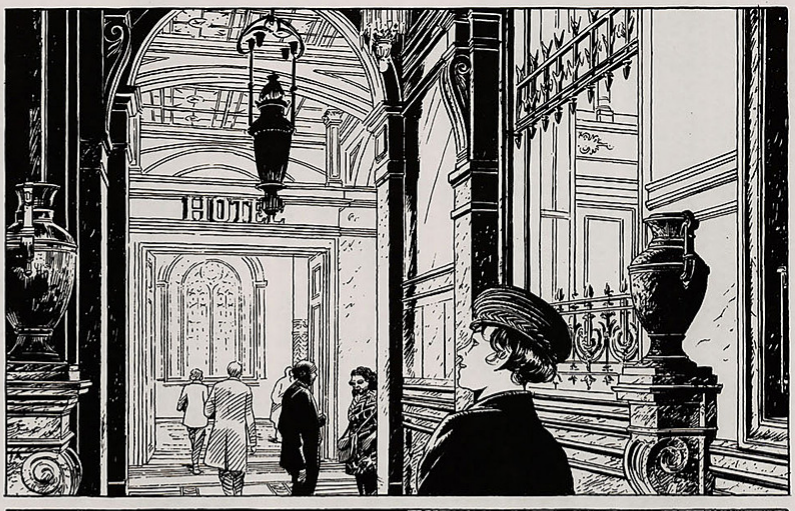
24TH JULY 11:50
WELL NOW, THIS IS CERTAINLY REMARKABLE. I JUST WONDER WHAT HAPPENED TO MY BOOKS.
15:33
THIS ONE WILL BE THE FINEST OF ALL!
NOW WE NEED SOME SHELLS TOO.
17:05
YOUR TEA, MADAME ELSA. THE WEATHER'S WONDERFUL, ISN'T IT?
YES, LEONIE. I THINK THE SUMMER'S REALLY STARTING NOW.
20:45
YOU HAVE SO MUCH ENERGY, BOSS!
YES, I'M POSITIVELY FLYING!

HERE YOU ARE, PASTRY AND A BEER.
HMM...
WHAT CAN I GET YOU FOR DESSERT? PERHAPS A RASPBERRY SOUFFLÉ?
UH... CAN I REALLY ALLOW MYSELF THAT..?
DON'T WORRY, IT'S LIGHT AS A FEATHER.
LIKE EVERYTHING OF YOURS.
THANK YOU FOR THE COMPLIMENT. TWO SOUFFLÉS THEN.

LIKE A THIEF IN THE NIGHT...

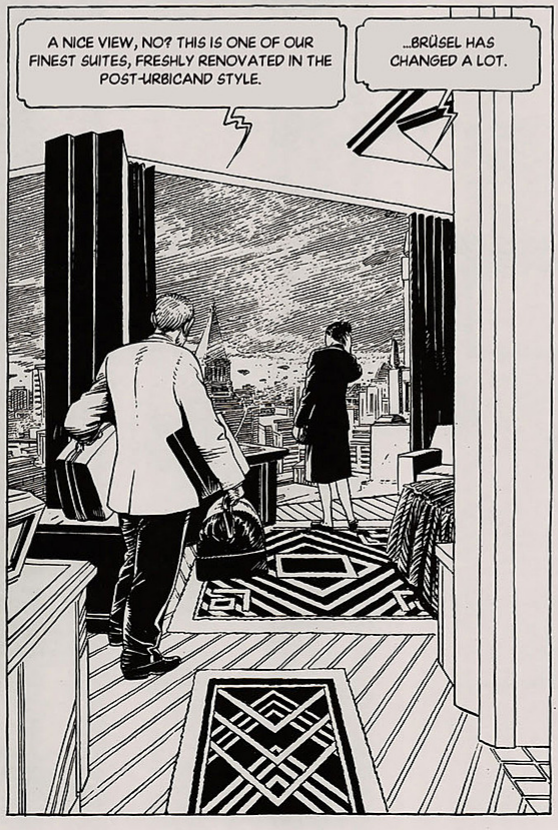
25TH JULY, 7:50
DRIN DRIN
I'M COMING, I'M COMING... WHAT CAN THEY WANT AT THIS TIME OF NIGHT?!
SO, WHAT IS IT?...OH, IT'S YOU, MONSIEUR EDMOND.
FORGIVE ME MADAME ELSA. I KNOW IT'S STILL SO EARLY...
BUT YOUR... THE THING IS NOTHING BUT TROUBLE.
WE HAVEN'T SLEPT THE WHOLE NIGHT... AND THEN OUR BOY'S ACCIDENT...
IN OTHER WORDS, HERE, TAKE IT BACK.
I'M SURPRISED AT YOU. YOU'RE NOT NORMALLY THE TYPES TO JUST THROW EVERYTHING AWAY.
QUITE RIGHT, QUITE RIGHT!
WHY DO THESE THINGS ALWAYS HAPPEN TO ME?
AND WE WON'T BE TAKEN FOR FOOLS. WHO KNOWS WHERE YOU GOT THAT THING FROM, BUT IF YOU THINK YOU'LL GET RID OF US LIKE THIS, YOU'RE SORELY MISTAKEN!
WE DIDN'T EXPECT THIS FROM YOU MADAME ELSA.

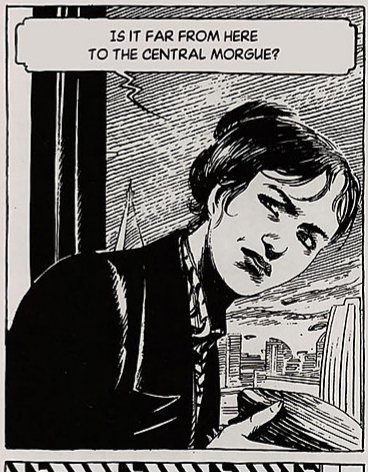

GALE


HOTEL

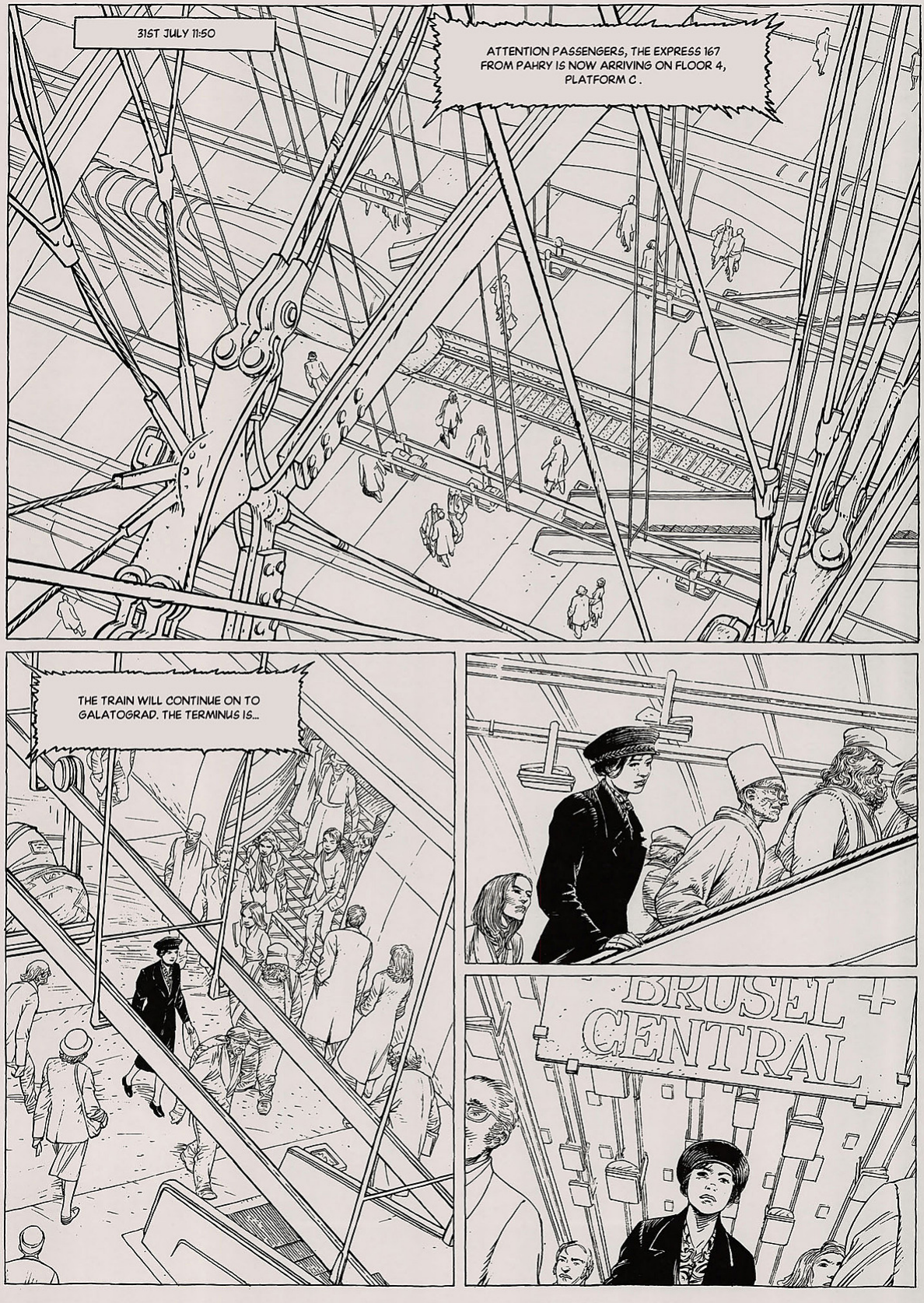
WELCOME, MADAME VON RATHEN! YOUR LUGGAGE HAS ALREADY ARRIVED.

HOW LONG DO YOU INTEND TO BE STAYING WITH US?
I DON'T KNOW EXACTLY YET. ONE OR TWO NIGHTS AT LEAST.


A NICE VIEW, NO? THIS IS ONE OF OUR FINEST SUITES, FRESHLY RENOVATED IN THE POST-URBICAND STYLE.
...BRÜSEL HAS CHANGED A LOT.

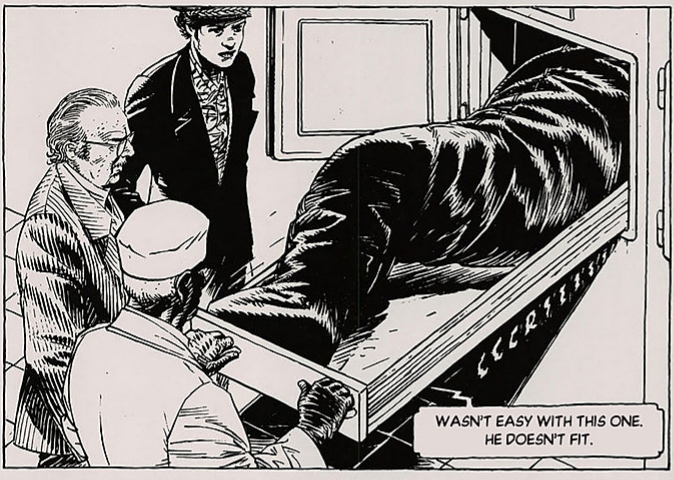

IS IT FAR FROM HERE TO THE CENTRAL MORGUE?

TO THE MORGUE? ER, NO... I'M SORRY, I DIDN'T KNOW THAT YOU... MY CONDOLENCES...

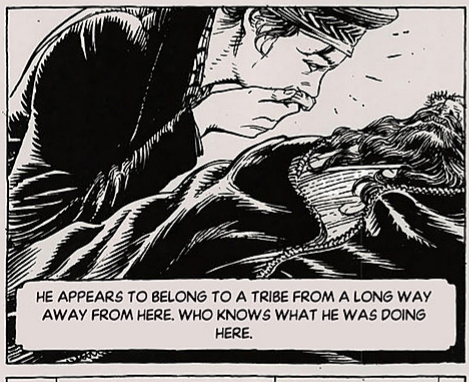

31ST JULY 11:50
ATTENTION PASSENGERS, THE EXPRESS 167 FROM PAHRY IS NOW ARRIVING ON FLOOR 4, PLATFORM C .
THE TRAIN WILL CONTINUE ON TO GALATOGRAD. THE TERMINUS IS...
BRUSEL + CENTRAL

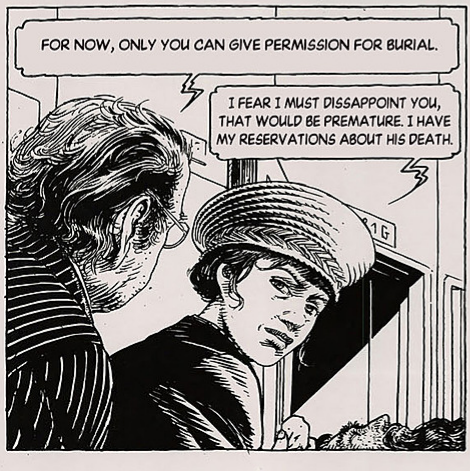
I NEED A LIST OF ANY UNUSUAL OCCURENCES IN THE LAST FEW WEEKS. EVEN THE MOST BANAL ONES.
THEN IT WILL BE A WHILE BEFORE THE BURIAL. IN BRÜSEL, THERE ARE A GREAT MANY UNUSUAL OCCURENCES.
HERE ARE THE FILES FOR JULY. IT REALLY IS A HUGE AMOUNT OF DATA.
GOOD. I WILL TAKE THE TIME TO SIFT THE TRUE FROM THE FALSE. THAT IS MY JOB AFTER ALL.
ARE YOU INTERESTED IN THESE SORTS OF THINGS? A PREVIOUSLY UNKNOWN DISEASE. A SORT OF RAPID ELEPHANTITIS.
4521
I THINK NOT, ILLNESSES ARE NOT MY LINE OF WORK.
OR... HM... THE OLD PROFESSOR BENAYOUN, HE BELIEVES HE HAS REDISCOVERED PREVIOUSLY LOST ANIMALS.
?
AHA, THE QUARXS, NO?

421G... THAT WOULD BE HERE.


WASN'T EASY WITH THIS ONE. HE DOESN'T FIT.

THE ACCIDENT HAPPENED ON THE 20TH OF JULY. THE MAN HAD NO PAPERS AND NO-ONE DECLARED HIM MISSING. EVEN THE APPEALS IN THE PAPERS DIDN'T TURN ANYTHING UP.


HE APPEARS TO BELONG TO A TRIBE FROM A LONG WAY AWAY FROM HERE. WHO KNOWS WHAT HE WAS DOING HERE.


FOR NOW, ONLY YOU CAN GIVE PERMISSION FOR BURIAL.
I FEAR I MUST DISSAPPOINT YOU, THAT WOULD BE PREMATURE. I HAVE MY RESERVATIONS ABOUT HIS DEATH.
1G

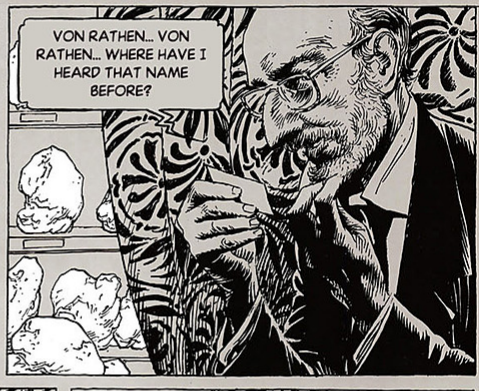
PUSH HIM BACK IN.
I'LL TRY MY BEST.

I FEAR I'LL HAVE TO STAY IN BRÜSEL A LITTLE LONGER THAN PLANNED.
OH? IS IT A SERIOUS CASE?

HE KEEPS SAYING HE HAS PROOF, BUT AS SOON AS WE TURN UP...
I'M FAMILIAR WITH THAT CASE ALREADY. IT HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH OUR CURRENT PROBLEM.
I'VE LEARNT ONE THING IN MY JOB... THE TRULY MYSTERIOUS THINGS MOSTLY TURN UP COMPLETELY UNNOTICED.
WE HAVE OLDER CASES TOO, WHICH WE'VE GOTTEN USED TOO NOW. FOR EXAMPLE MONSIEUR SERVAIS, WHO CLAIMS THAT TIME HAS NO EFFECT ON HIM.
HE DOES LOOK AS GOOD AS HE ALWAYS DID, BUT...
49 Jahre
ETERNAL LIFE... AH, IF ONLY...
91 Jahre
YOU SAID IT... AND THEN THERE'S THE MAN WHO SENDS US PRECISE REPORTS DAILY ABOUT STONES THAT JUST TURN UP IN HIS APARTMENT OUT OF THIN AIR....
INTERESTING.
MONSIEUR ABEELS... CONSTANT ABEELS.
CAN I TAKE THIS FILE WITH ME?

SO THIS IS YOUR JOB? CATALOGUING UNEXPLAINED PHENOMENA? SOUNDS INTERESTING.

OH... USUALLY IT TURNS OUT TO HAVE BEEN FOR ABSOLUTELY NOTHING. BUT YOUR CASE IS OBVIOUSLY DIFFERENT.


VON RATHEN... VON RATHEN... WHERE HAVE I HEARD THAT NAME BEFORE?

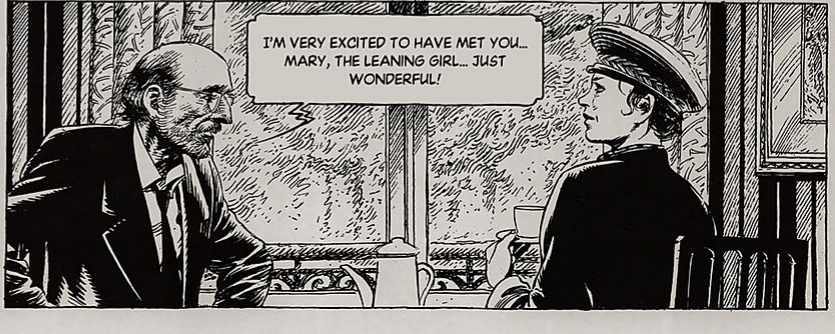
YES, THAT'S IT... YOU'RE MARY, THE "LEANING GIRL"!

WELL... THAT'S SO MANY YEARS AGO NOW.

THEN YOU KNEW WAPPENDORF?

HE WAS MY TEACHER. EVERYTHING I KNOW, HE TAUGHT ME.

AXEL, GOOD OLD AXEL WAPPENDORF... I THINK OF HIM OFTEN.

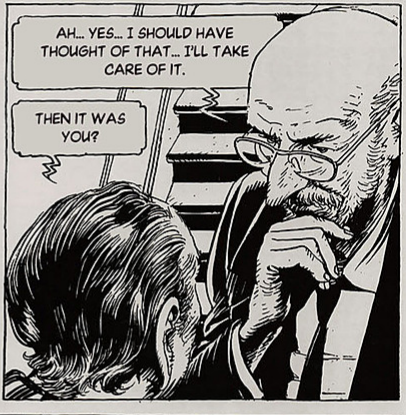

I'M VERY EXCITED TO HAVE MET YOU... MARY, THE LEANING GIRL... JUST WONDERFUL!

YES, NOW I RECOGNISE YOU. YOU'VE HARDLY CHANGED AT ALL.
BACK TO THE MATTER AT HAND... DO YOU KNOW OF ANY OTHER UNUSUAL OCCURENCES?
WELL, YES... ON THE DAY THAT I FOUND THE FIRST STONE, I HELPED MY NEIGHBOUR WITH A BIN FULL OF SAND. AND I THINK, SHE STILL HAS PROBLEMS WITH SAND EVEN NOW...
I IMAGINE THAT THE SAND MIGHT BE TURNING UP OUT OF THIN AIR, JUST LIKE MY STONES.
SAND! THAT'S TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE!
?!?
HAVEN'T YOU HEARD OF THE SAND GRAIN THEORY? THE MINISCULE DETAIL THAT CAN LEAD TO SO MUCH?
THE SAND GRAIN THEORY... YES, OF COURSE...
DO YOU KNOW THE WOMAN'S NAME?
I'LL COME WITH YOU, IT'S NO TROUBLE AT ALL.
ANOTHER ONE... NO, TWO! THE TIME BETWEEN THEM KEEPS GETTING SHORTER.
ANTIPOVA. KRISTIN ANTIPOVA. SHE'S RAISING HER TWO CHILDREN ALL BY HERSELF. SHE DOESN'T LIVE FAR FROM HERE AND SHE SHOULD BE HOME AT THIS TIME.

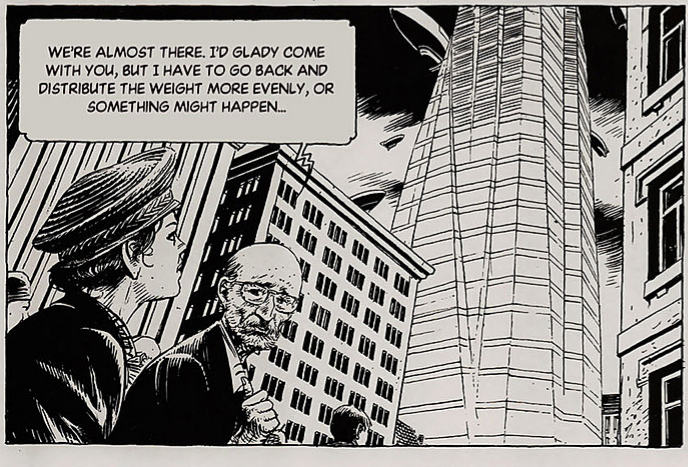
MONSIEUR CONSTANT.

YOU'VE ALWAYS GOT AN ANSWER FOR EVERYTHING, HAVEN'T YOU? WELL, STRANGE THINGS ARE HAPPENING IN MY APARTMENT.
OH YES?... WELL THAT'S GOOD TIMING.

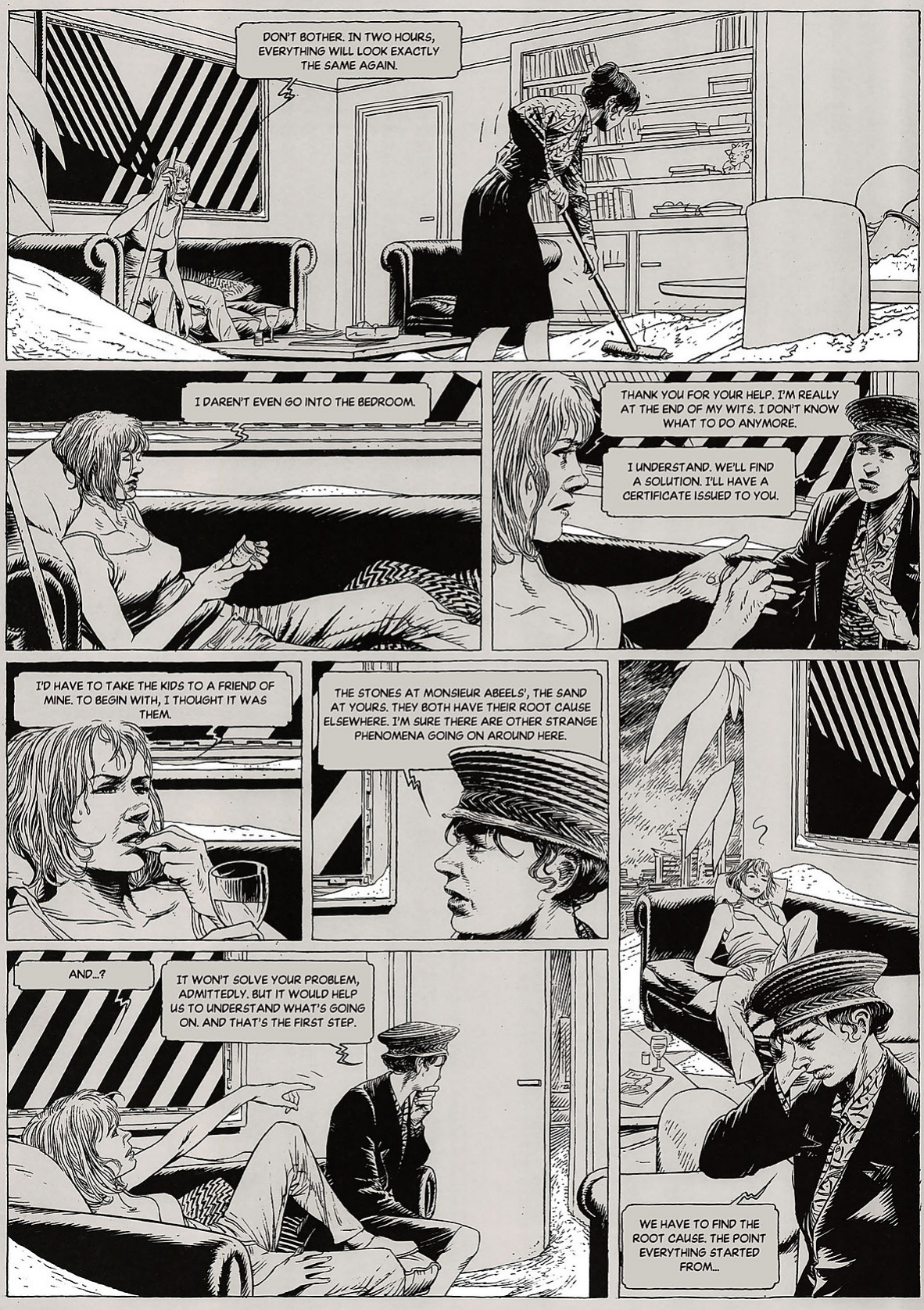
WHY GOOD TIMING? MY CEILING IS BUCKLING AND NOW THE PAINT IS EVEN FLAKING OFF! WHAT EXACTLY DO YOU HAVE IN YOUR OFFICE, HMM?


AH... YES... I SHOULD HAVE THOUGHT OF THAT... I'LL TAKE CARE OF IT.
THEN IT WAS YOU?

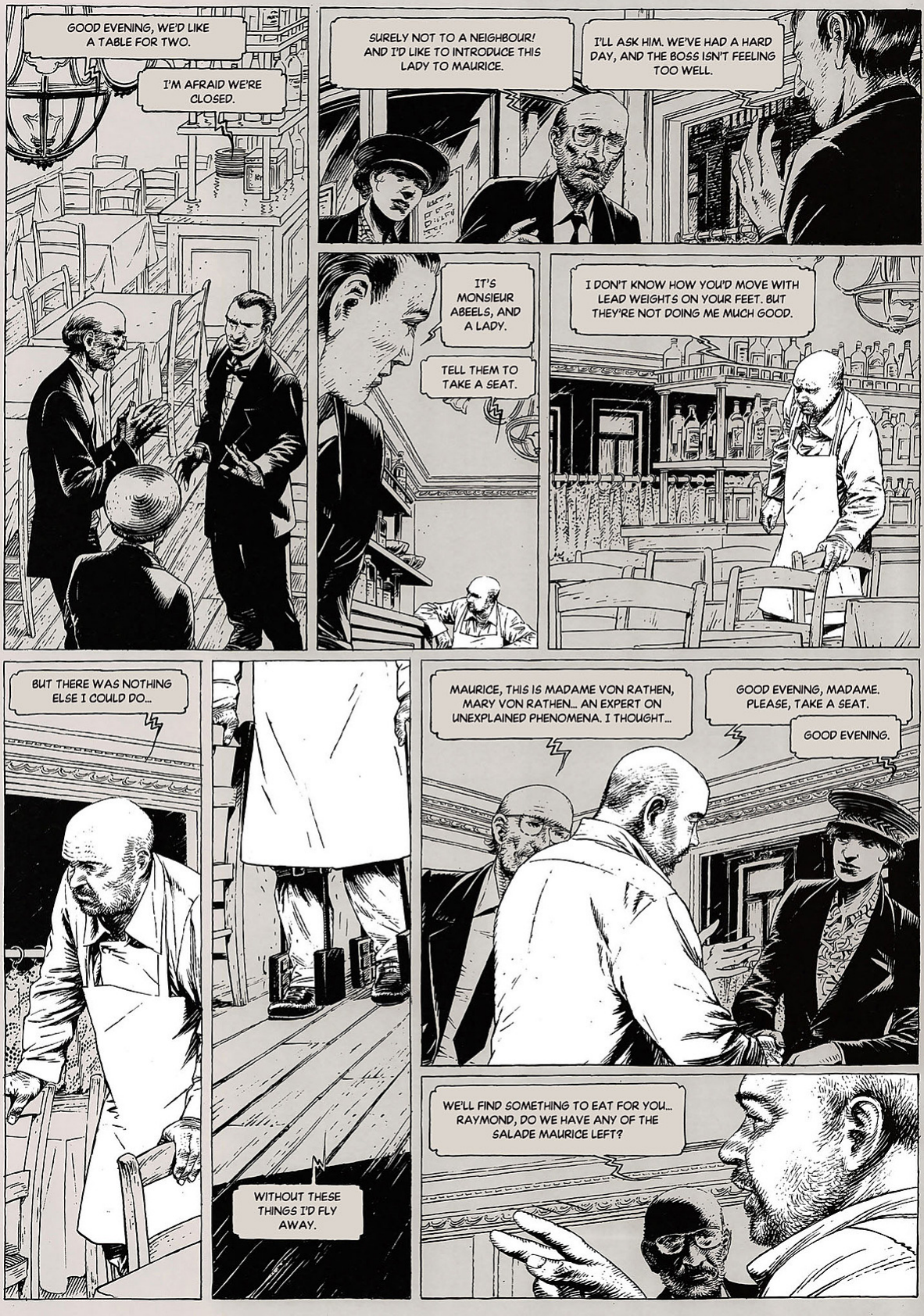
I'M SORRY. I'M SURE THAT DELAY DIDN'T HELP YOUR CASE STUDIES AT ALL.


WE'RE ALMOST THERE. I'D GLADY COME WITH YOU, BUT I HAVE TO GO BACK AND DISTRIBUTE THE WEIGHT MORE EVENLY, OR SOMETHING MIGHT HAPPEN...

THANK YOU FOR EVERYTHING, MONSIEUR ABEELS.
IT WAS A PLEASURE, MADAME VON RATHEN. WE'LL MEET AGAIN, I HOPE.


DON'T BOTHER. IN TWO HOURS, EVERYTHING WILL LOOK EXACTLY THE SAME AGAIN.
I DAREN'T EVEN GO INTO THE BEDROOM.
THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP. I'M REALLY AT THE END OF MY WITS. I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO ANYMORE.
I UNDERSTAND. WE'LL FIND A SOLUTION. I'LL HAVE A CERTIFICATE ISSUED TO YOU.
I'D HAVE TO TAKE THE KIDS TO A FRIEND OF MINE. TO BEGIN WITH, I THOUGHT IT WAS THEM.
THE STONES AT MONSIEUR ABEELS', THE SAND AT YOURS. THEY BOTH HAVE THEIR ROOT CAUSE ELSEWHERE. I'M SURE THERE ARE OTHER STRANGE PHENOMENA GOING ON AROUND HERE.
AND...?
IT WON'T SOLVE YOUR PROBLEM, ADMITTEDLY. BUT IT WOULD HELP US TO UNDERSTAND WHAT'S GOING ON. AND THAT'S THE FIRST STEP.
WE HAVE TO FIND THE ROOT CAUSE. THE POINT EVERYTHING STARTED FROM...

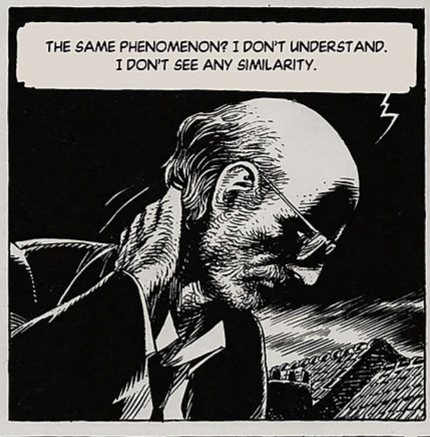
HELLO, MARY.
?
HELLO... WHAT ABOUT YOUR STONES?
EVERYTHING'S SORTED. AT LEAST, FOR NOW.
I JUST THOUGHT OF SOMETHING ELSE... FUNNY THINGS ARE GOING ON AT MAURICE'S.
INTERESTING. AND WHO IS MAURICE?
"CHEZ MAURICE" DON'T YOU KNOW THAT RESTAURANT? IT'S THE BEST IN THE CITY, AND RIGHT BY MY HOUSE TOO.
IF YOU'VE NOTHING BETTER TO DO, WE COULD EAT THERE TONIGHT. I'LL INTRODUCE YOU TO MAURICE AND YOU CAN SEE FOR YOURSELF.
YOU GET STRAIGHT TO THE POINT, DON'T YOU, MONSIEUR ABEELS?
CALL ME CONSTANT... IN HONOUR OF WAPPENDORF.
MAURICE
HE'S QUITE THE BON VIVANT, YOU'LL SEE.

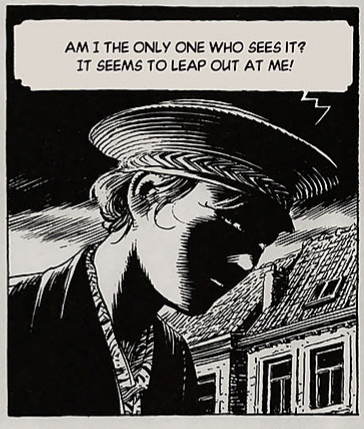

GOOD EVENING, WE'D LIKE A TABLE FOR TWO.
I'M AFRAID WE'RE CLOSED.
SURELY NOT TO A NEIGHBOUR! AND I'D LIKE TO INTRODUCE THIS LADY TO MAURICE.
I'LL ASK HIM. WE'VE HAD A HARD DAY, AND THE BOSS ISN'T FEELING TOO WELL.
IT'S MONSIEUR ABEELS, AND A LADY.
TELL THEM TO TAKE A SEAT.
I DON'T KNOW HOW YOU'D MOVE WITH LEAD WEIGHTS ON YOUR FEET. BUT THEY'RE NOT DOING ME MUCH GOOD.
BUT THERE WAS NOTHING ELSE I COULD DO...
WITHOUT THESE THINGS I'D FLY AWAY.
MAURICE, THIS IS MADAME VON RATHEN, MARY VON RATHEN... AN EXPERT ON UNEXPLAINED PHENOMENA. I THOUGHT...
GOOD EVENING, MADAME. PLEASE, TAKE A SEAT.
GOOD EVENING.
WE'LL FIND SOMETHING TO EAT FOR YOU... RAYMOND, DO WE HAVE ANY OF THE SALADE MAURICE LEFT?

I'VE PROBABLY LOST ANOTHER FEW KILO LATELY. BUT I CAN'T BE SURE, BECAUSE I CAN'T GET ON THE SCALES!
UM... WHY NOT?
I CAN'T STAY ON THE SCALES. IT'S AS IF I'M COMPLETELY WEIGHTLESS.
COULD YOU POSSIBLE TAKE OFF THE WEIGHTS? IT MIGHT HELP ME UNDERSTAND WHAT'S GOING ON HERE.
YOU SEE? IT DOESN'T HURT AT ALL, BUT SINCE THIS MORNING, YOU CAN GET A WHOLE HAND BETWEEN THE FLOOR AND MY FEET.
!?
YOU NEEDN'T BE AFRAID...
REMARKABLE.
YOU SAID IT. AT FIRST I THOUGHT IT WAS DOWN TO MY NEW RECIPES, BUT THAT CAN'T BE IT.

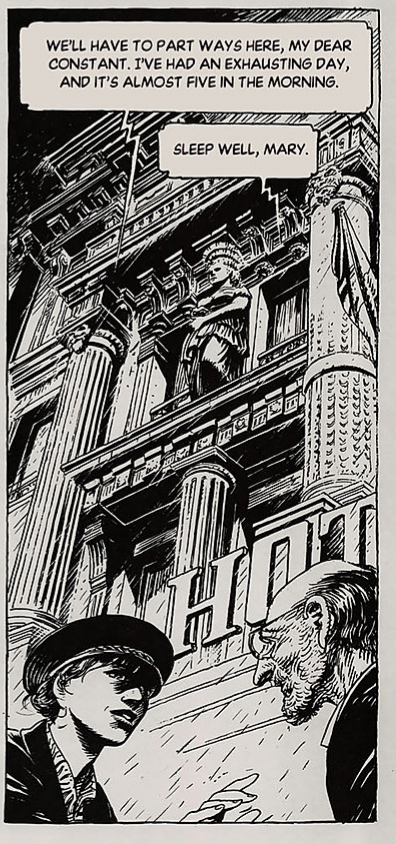
I DON'T KNOW IF I DARE EVEN ASK YOU TO HAVE A DRINK WITH ME, WHO KNOWS WHAT WE'D FIND..
WHY DON'T YOU JUST TAKE ME BACK TO MY HOTEL.

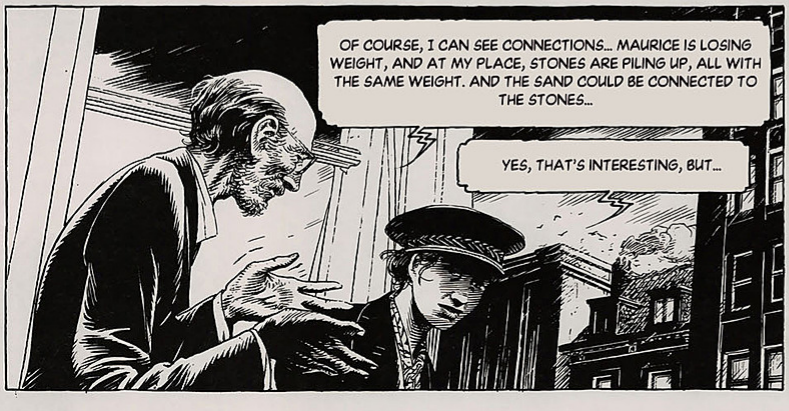
IT REALLY IS UNBELIEVABLE. THE SAME PHENOMENON IS OCCURRING WITH MAURICE AND WITH YOUR STONES. AND WITH KRISTIN ANTIPOVA TOO.

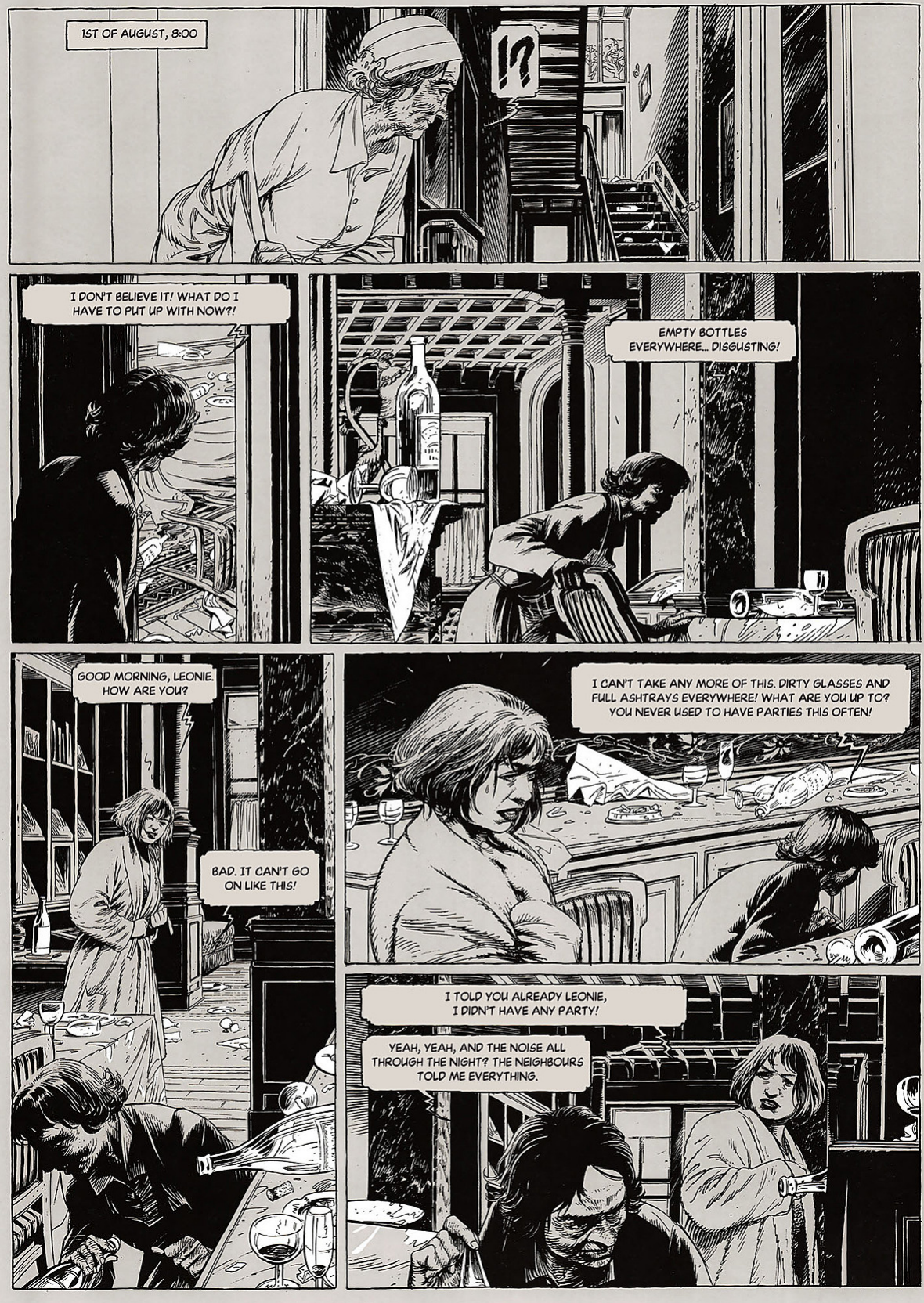

THE SAME PHENOMENON? I DON'T UNDERSTAND. I DON'T SEE ANY SIMILARITY.


AM I THE ONLY ONE WHO SEES IT? IT SEEMS TO LEAP OUT AT ME!

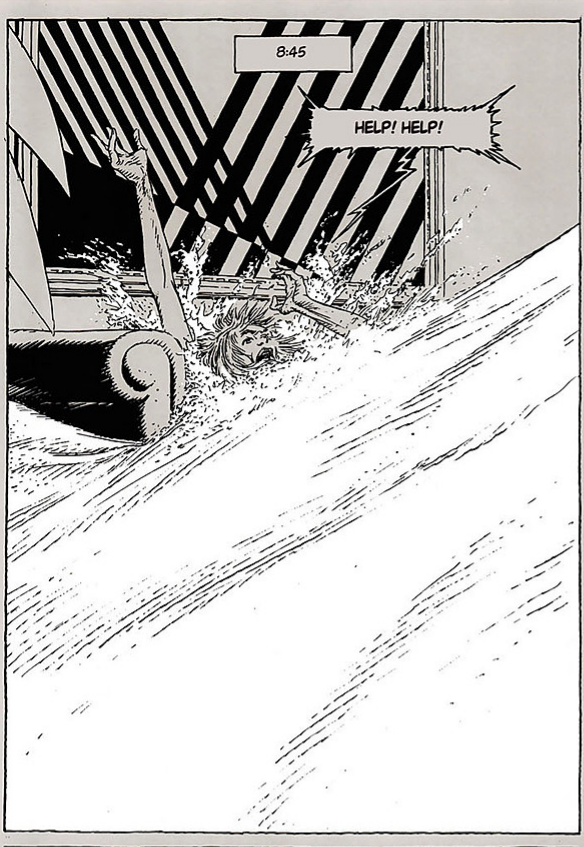
WHAT DOES?
OH, NOTHING... THIS HAPPENS TO ME A LOT. I'M STILL NOT USED TO IT.


WE'LL HAVE TO PART WAYS HERE, MY DEAR CONSTANT. I'VE HAD AN EXHAUSTING DAY, AND IT'S ALMOST FIVE IN THE MORNING.
SLEEP WELL, MARY.

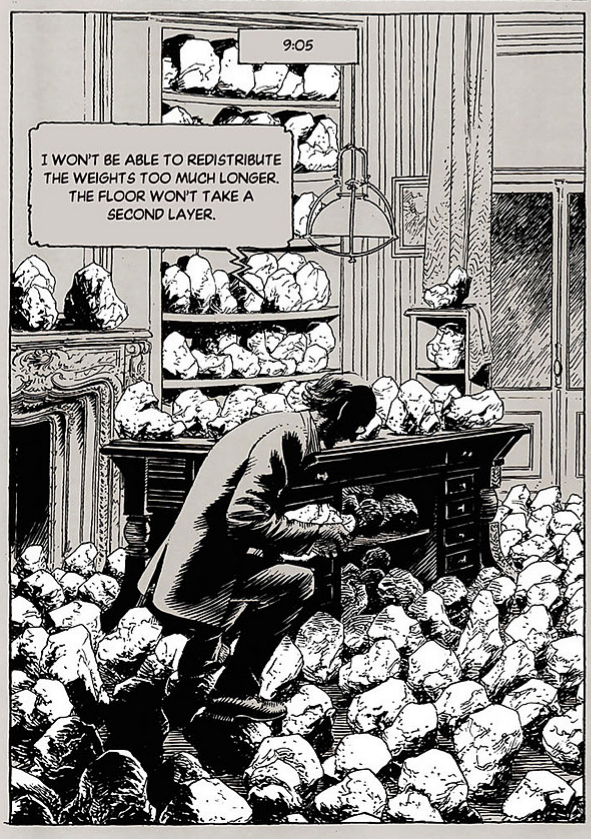

OF COURSE, I CAN SEE CONNECTIONS... MAURICE IS LOSING WEIGHT, AND AT MY PLACE, STONES ARE PILING UP, ALL WITH THE SAME WEIGHT. AND THE SAND COULD BE CONNECTED TO THE STONES...
YES, THAT'S INTERESTING, BUT...


1ST OF AUGUST, 8:00
17
I DON'T BELIEVE IT! WHAT DO I HAVE TO PUT UP WITH NOW?!
EMPTY BOTTLES EVERYWHERE... DISGUSTING!
GOOD MORNING, LEONIE. HOW ARE YOU?
BAD. IT CAN'T GO ON LIKE THIS!
I CAN'T TAKE ANY MORE OF THIS. DIRTY GLASSES AND FULL ASHTRAYS EVERYWHERE! WHAT ARE YOU UP TO? YOU NEVER USED TO HAVE PARTIES THIS OFTEN!
I TOLD YOU ALREADY LEONIE, I DIDN'T HAVE ANY PARTY!
YEAH, YEAH, AND THE NOISE ALL THROUGH THE NIGHT? THE NEIGHBOURS TOLD ME EVERYTHING.

PLEASE, LEONIE, DON'T GET SO WORKED UP OVER LITTLE THINGS. IF ANYONE HAS CAUSE TO BE STRESSED, IT'S ME...
YOU'VE CHANGED SO MUCH. YOU'RE ALWAYS TIRED, ALWAYS STRESSED... THIS NEVER WOULD HAVE HAPPENED WHILE YOUR PARENTS WERE ALIVE.
I WILL ADMIT, THERE ARE STRANGE THINGS GOING ON HERE. I DO FEEL A LITTLE OVERWHELMED, BUT...
I CAN SEE EXACTLY WHAT'S GOING ON! JUST TAKE A LOOK AT YOURSELF IN THE MIRROR, THOSE BAGS UNDER YOUR EYES. THEY SPEAK VOLUMES. DON'T TRY TO TELL ME YOU SLEEP PEACEFULLY AT NIGHT!
THAT'S ENOUGH, LEONIE!
QUITE RIGHT, THAT'S ENOUGH! IF I'D KNOWN WHAT KIND OF A FLOPHOUSE THIS PLACE WOULD BE, I'D NEVER HAVE STARTED WORKING HERE. I QUIT.
Y-YOU CAN'T DO THAT, I...
OF COURSE I CAN! I WON'T STAY HERE ONE MINUTE LONGER! AND THIS WAS ALWAYS SUCH A FINE UPSTANDING HOUSE, WHAT A SHAME...
KLAK

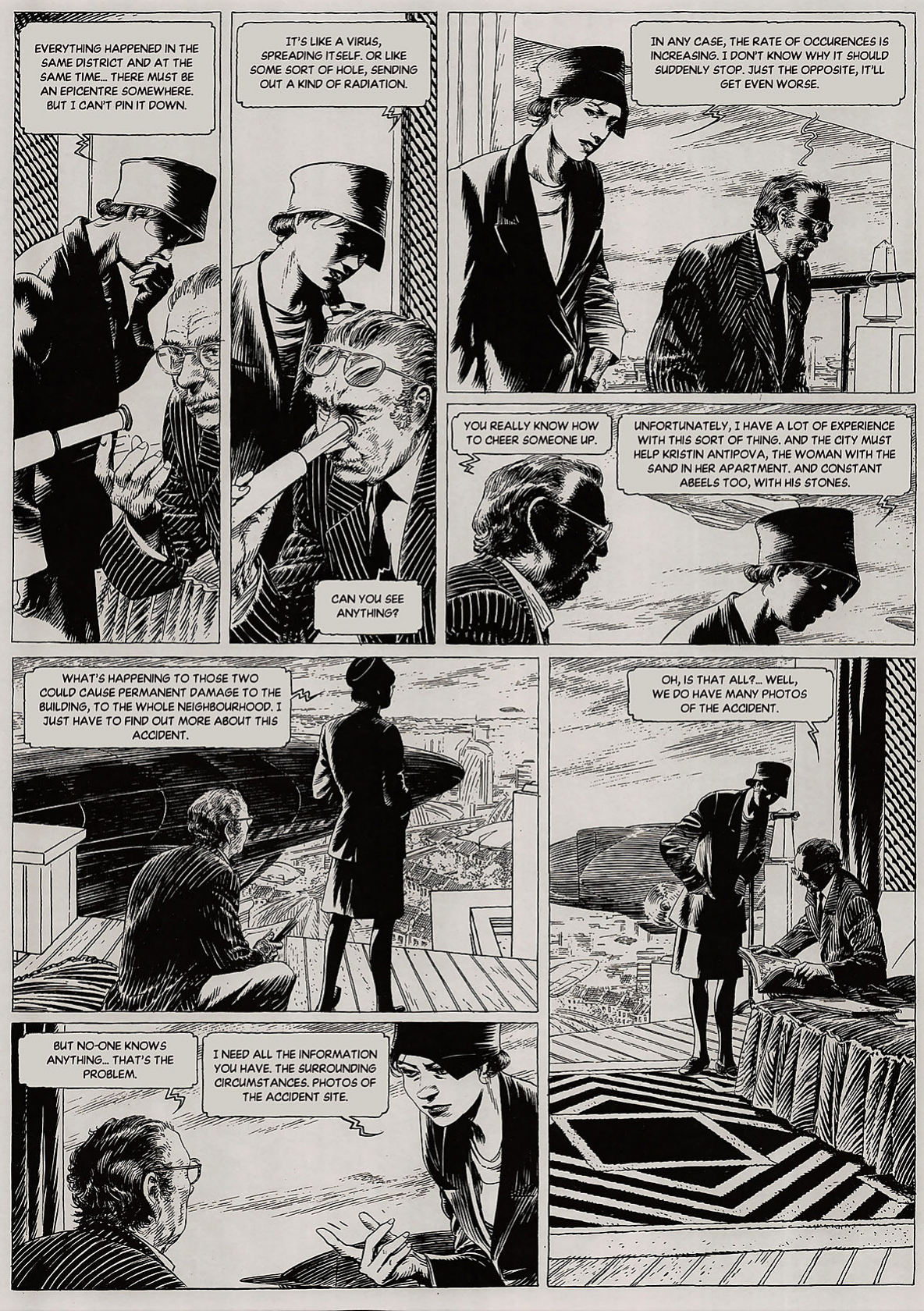

8:45
HELP! HELP!

8:50
GOOD, IT HELD. BUT WHAT WILL HAPPEN TOMORROW NIGHT?


9:05
I WON'T BE ABLE TO REDISTRIBUTE THE WEIGHTS TOO MUCH LONGER. THE FLOOR WON'T TAKE A SECOND LAYER.

9:30
LOOK WHAT I FOUND, TONIO! IT LOOKS LIKE PURE GOLD!

I'VE BROUGHT SOME NEW REPORTS THAT I'M SURE WILL INTEREST YOU. THERE ARE SOME VERY STRANGE ONES HERE TOO.
THIS MAN CLAIMS HE'S CONSTANTLY SURROUNDED BY FOG. HE'S ALWAYS INSIDE A FOG BANK.
YES, THAT IS INTERESTING. PERHAPS THERE'S A CONNECTION.
I'M SURE THERE ARE MANY INTERESTING CASES. BUT RIGHT NOW, I DON'T HAVE TIME TO INVESTIGATE ALL OF THEM.
THE PROBLEM IS THAT I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHAT'S BEHIND THEM.
I'VE NEVER SEEN SUCH A CONCENTRATION OF UNUSUAL PHENOMENA.


EVERYTHING HAPPENED IN THE SAME DISTRICT AND AT THE SAME TIME... THERE MUST BE AN EPICENTRE SOMEWHERE. BUT I CAN'T PIN IT DOWN.
IT'S LIKE A VIRUS, SPREADING ITSELF. OR LIKE SOME SORT OF HOLE, SENDING OUT A KIND OF RADIATION.
CAN YOU SEE ANYTHING?
IN ANY CASE, THE RATE OF OCCURENCES IS INCREASING. I DON'T KNOW WHY IT SHOULD SUDDENLY STOP. JUST THE OPPOSITE, IT'LL GET EVEN WORSE.
YOU REALLY KNOW HOW TO CHEER SOMEONE UP.
UNFORTUNATELY, I HAVE A LOT OF EXPERIENCE WITH THIS SORT OF THING. AND THE CITY MUST HELP KRISTIN ANTIPOVA, THE WOMAN WITH THE SAND IN HER APARTMENT. AND CONSTANT ABEELS TOO, WITH HIS STONES.
WHAT'S HAPPENING TO THOSE TWO COULD CAUSE PERMANENT DAMAGE TO THE BUILDING, TO THE WHOLE NEIGHBOURHOOD. I JUST HAVE TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THIS ACCIDENT.
OH, IS THAT ALL?... WELL, WE DO HAVE MANY PHOTOS OF THE ACCIDENT.
BUT NO-ONE KNOWS ANYTHING... THAT'S THE PROBLEM.
I NEED ALL THE INFORMATION YOU HAVE. THE SURROUNDING CIRCUMSTANCES. PHOTOS OF THE ACCIDENT SITE.

MANY THANKS FOR YOUR HELP... I WOULD NEVER HAVE MANAGED THIS ALONE.
WELL, I LIKE THESE STONES.
I THINK I'LL KEEP A FEW FOR MYSELF.
AS MANY AS YOU... UFF, YOU LIKE... HHH... THEY WON'T ALL FIT IN THE BIN ANYWAY.
?
WHY DON'T YOU PUT THEM ALL DOWN?
ABSOLUTELY NOT!
I HAVE TO KEEP AT LEAST TWO. THEY'RE ALL THAT'S KEEPING ME ON THE GROUND.
OH, MONSIEUR CONSTANT, YOU POOR MAN! HOW DID THIS HAPPEN?
IF I ONLY KNEW.
ANYWAY, IT'S VERY UNPLEAS-ANT.
MY GOD...
I KNOW, I SEE. WE'LL HAVE TO KEEP AT IT... OR FIND SOME REINFORCEMENTS.
KRRR

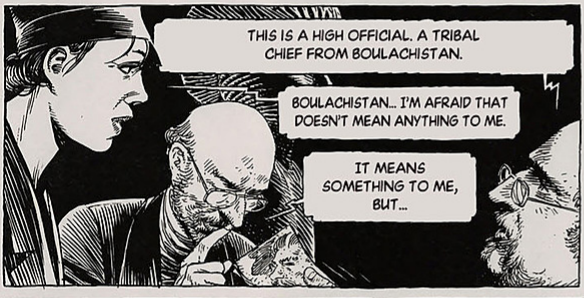
OH, MARY! HOW LOVELY TO SEE YOU!
HELLO, CONSTANT.
I LOVE YOUR NEW HAT.
THANK YOU... WE'VE REACHED THE NEXT LEVEL. I'LL HAVE TO STAY IN BRÜSEL A LITTLE LONGER.
GLAD TO HEAR IT!
DON'T BE TOO HAPPY ABOUT IT.
HELLO, MARY!
HELLO, MONSIEUR MAURICE. YOU DIDN'T TELL ME THAT THERE WAS AN UNUSUAL ACCIDENT RIGHT OUTSIDE YOUR DOOR.
YES, THAT'S RIGHT, THE SAVAGE... SAD, VERY SAD... BUT IT WAS ALL OVER WHEN I ARRIVED.
AND WHEN DID YOUR WEIGHT PROBLEM START?
HMM... I DON'T KNOW EXACTLY... BEFORE THE ACCIDENT IN ANY CASE.
MY STONES TOO, ONE OR TWO DAYS BEFORE, I THINK.
THAT LOOKS NICE, DON'T YOU THINK? REALLY DRAWS YOU INTO THE RESTAURANT.
IT LOOKS NICE NOW, YES, BUT WHAT ABOUT TOMORROW?
HMPH, TOMORROW.

I FEEL WORN OUT JUST LOOKING AT YOU, MAURICE.
BUT I FEEL GREAT. YOUR PRIME NUMBERS HAVE GROWN ON ME.
STRANGE. NO-ONE SEEMS TO REMEMBER HOW SERIOUS THE SITUATION IS. I WANTED INFORMATION ABOUT THE DEAD MAN, BUT...
THEN I KNOW THE ADDRESS YOU WANT. CARL DYRIOUX IS IN CHARGE OF THE GALLERY OF DISTANT LANDS. HE'S SURE TO KNOW WHERE YOUR MAN COMES FROM.
IT'S NOT FAR AT ALL. I'LL TAKE YOU THERE, MARY.
SOMETHING JUST OCCURRED TO ME. WE SHOULD FIND A GEOLOGIST. HE COULD ANALYSE MY STONES AND DETERMINE THEIR ORIGIN.
PERHAPS THEY COME FROM THE SEA, LIKE MADAME ANTIPOVA'S SAND. AT LEAST THAT WOULD BE A CLUE...
LALÜ
LALÜ
LALÜ
LALÜ
HMM... I FEAR WE HAVE BIGGER PROBLEMS.
YOU'RE RIGHT, IT'S GETTING FASTER.
AND WHERE'S THE OWNER?
POOR MADAME ANTIPOVA! SHE HAD A NERVOUS BREAKDOWN, SHE HAD TO BE TAKEN AWAY.
SHE WASN'T TALKING AT ALL
AND THE SAND'S STILL POURING DOWN. SOMETHING HAS TO BE DONE ABOUT IT!

I CAN SEE IT COMING, THE BINMEN ARE GOING TO STRIKE...
BUT WE CAN'T GET RID OF IT OURSELVES!
COUGH COUGH
HOPEFULLY MONSIEUR DYRIOUX CAN HELP US. I DON'T KNOW WHO ELSE COULD.
STRANGE PLACE.
GALERIE DES MONDES LOINTAINS
HM...
IS ANYONE THERE?
AH, VISITORS! RARE IN THESE TROUBLED TIMES...
RIGHT NOW, THERE'S NO NEED TO EVEN LEAVE BRÜSEL IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR ADVENTURE.
THAT'S JUST WHY WE CAME TO SEE YOU.

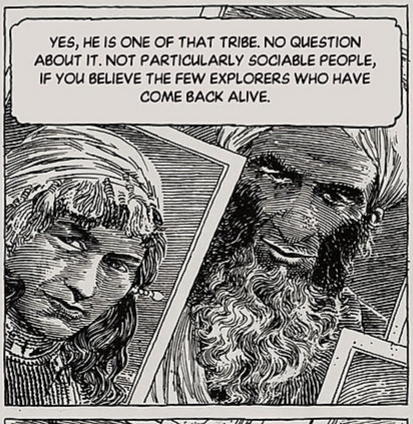
I MUST KNOW WHERE THIS POOR MAN CAME FROM.

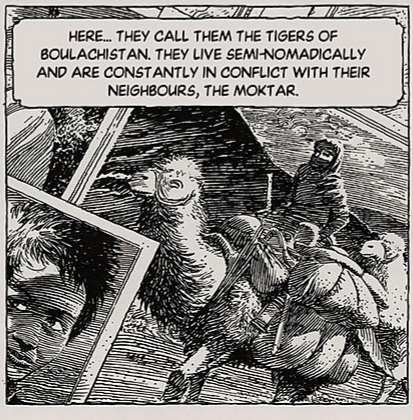
POOR... HE WASN'T ALWAYS POOR.


THIS IS A HIGH OFFICIAL. A TRIBAL CHIEF FROM BOULACHISTAN.
BOULACHISTAN.. I'M AFRAID THAT DOESN'T MEAN ANYTHING TO ME.
IT MEANS SOMETHING TO ME, BUT...

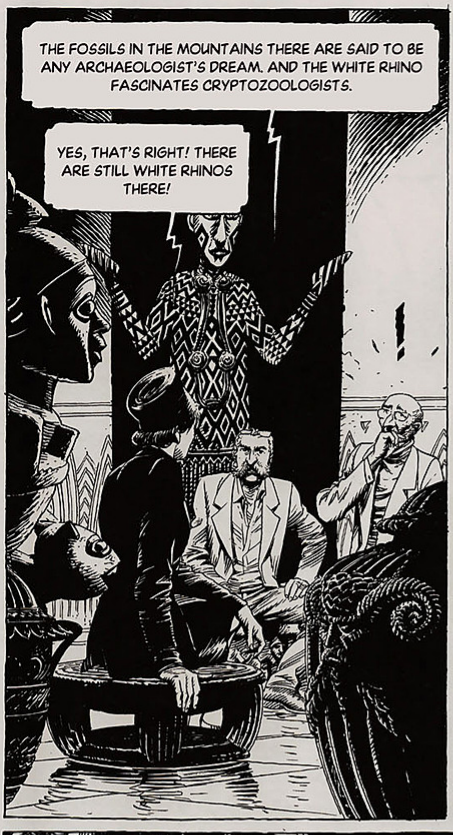
THE BUGTI ARE A SMALL, COMPLETELY ISOLATED TRIBE.
WHERE DO THEY LIVE?
I'LL SHOW YOU.

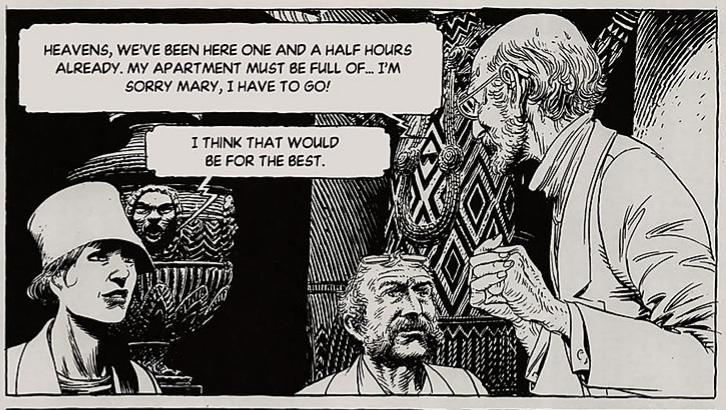
IN THIS REGION HERE, BEYOND MARAHUACA. AN AWFUL PLACE, HARSH CLIMATE, HUGE TEMPERATURE DIFFERENCES...

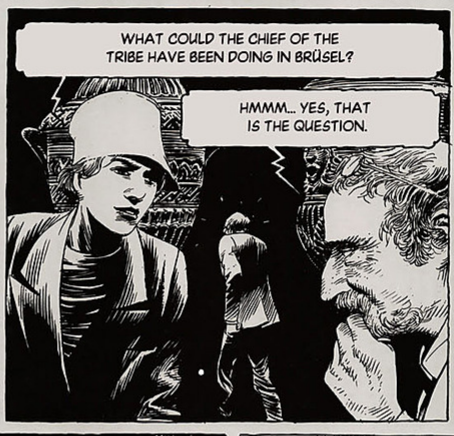

YES, HE IS ONE OF THAT TRIBE. NO QUESTION ABOUT IT. NOT PARTICULARLY SOCIABLE PEOPLE, IF YOU BELIEVE THE FEW EXPLORERS WHO HAVE COME BACK ALIVE.

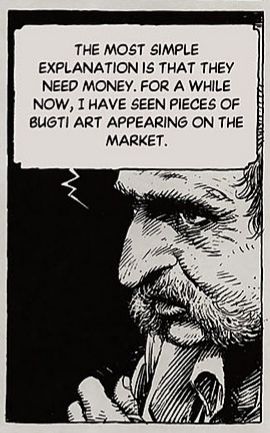

HERE... THEY CALL THEM THE TIGERS OF BOULACHISTAN. THEY LIVE SEMI-NOMADICALLY AND ARE CONSTANTLY IN CONFLICT WITH THEIR NEIGHBOURS, THE MOKTAR.

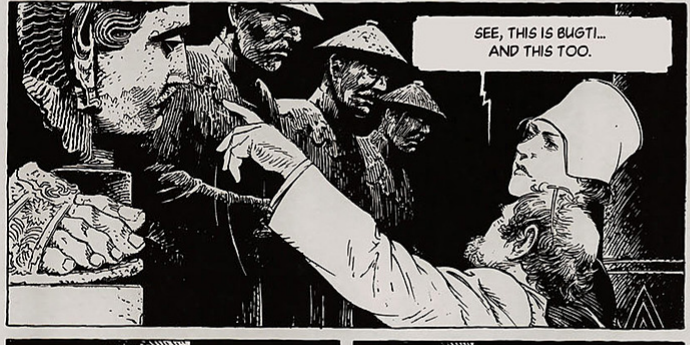
APPARENTLY THE BUGTI SPEAK A VERY PURE FORM OF OUR LANGUAGE, AT LEAST THE OLD ONES DO. ODD, HOW QUICKLY THEY LEARNT IT FROM THE EXPLORERS.


THE FOSSILS IN THE MOUNTAINS THERE ARE SAID TO BE ANY ARCHAEOLOGIST'S DREAM. AND THE WHITE RHINO FASCINATES CRYPTOZOOLOGISTS.
YES, THAT'S RIGHT! THERE ARE STILL WHITE RHINOS THERE!

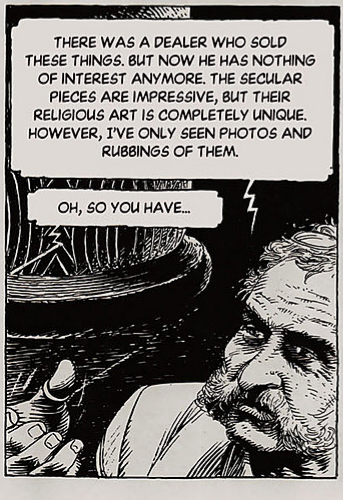

HEAVENS, WE'VE BEEN HERE ONE AND A HALF HOURS ALREADY. MY APARTMENT MUST BE FULL OF... I'M SORRY MARY, I HAVE TO GO!
I THINK THAT WOULD BE FOR THE BEST.

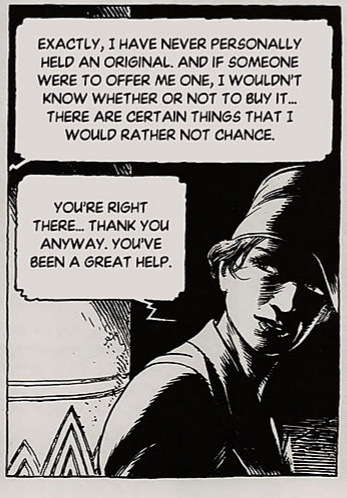

WHAT COULD THE CHIEF OF THE TRIBE HAVE BEEN DOING IN BRÜSEL?
HMMM... YES, THAT IS THE QUESTION.


THE MOST SIMPLE EXPLANATION IS THAT THEY NEED MONEY. FOR A WHILE NOW, I HAVE SEEN PIECES OF BUGTI ART APPEARING ON THE MARKET.


SEE, THIS IS BUGTI... AND THIS TOO.

REALLY? YOU'RE WELCOME TO VISIT ANY TIME... I'LL KEEP LOOKING THROUGH MY BOOKS, MAYBE I'LL KNOW MORE LATER.

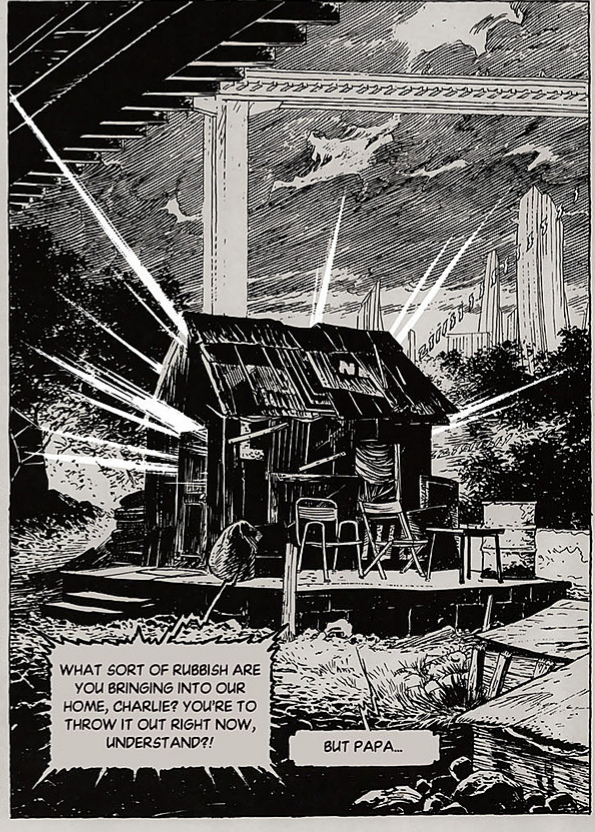

THERE WAS A DEALER WHO SOLD THESE THINGS. BUT NOW HE HAS NOTHING OF INTEREST ANYMORE. THE SECULAR PIECES ARE IMPRESSIVE, BUT THEIR RELIGIOUS ART IS COMPLETELY UNIQUE. HOWEVER, I'VE ONLY SEEN PHOTOS AND RUBBINGS OF THEM.
OH, SO YOU HAVE...

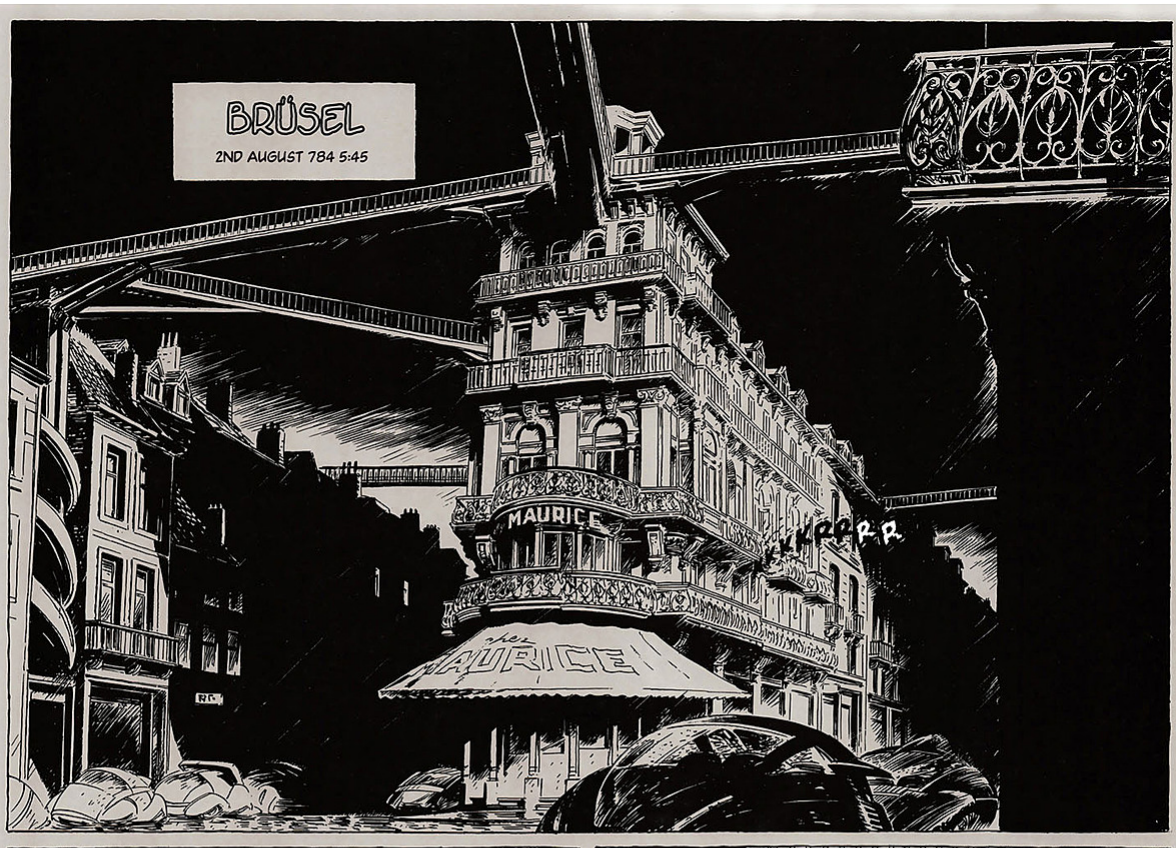

EXACTLY, I HAVE NEVER PERSONALLY HELD AN ORIGINAL. AND IF SOMEONE WERE TO OFFER ME ONE, I WOULDN'T KNOW WHETHER OR NOT TO BUY IT... THERE ARE CERTAIN THINGS THAT I WOULD RATHER NOT CHANCE.
YOU'RE RIGHT THERE... THANK YOU ANYWAY. YOU'VE BEEN A GREAT HELP.

THAT'S ENOUGH! IT CAN'T GO ON LIKE THIS, EVEN IF HER NAME IS VON RATHEN...
AND SHE WAS MEANT TO FIX EVERYTHING!

ZZZZ...ZZZZ
AT FIRST, THE CUSTOMERS LIKED IT...
BUT NOW IT SCARES THEM.

HORTA HOUSE For Sale
FOR SALE
MADAME AUTRIQUE IS SELLING HER HOUSE!
OH NO. WHAT WOULD HER PARENTS HAVE SAID TO THIS?


WHAT SORT OF RUBBISH ARE YOU BRINGING INTO OUR HOME, CHARLIE? YOU'RE TO THROW IT OUT RIGHT NOW, UNDERSTAND?!
BUT PAPA...


BRÜSEL
2ND AUGUST 784 5:45
MAURICE
chez
MAURICE
RC
KKRRR

!
KKKRRR
KKKR
BAM
BAM

OH GOD, I DON'T BELIEVE IT!

HELP! HELP!
OH-OH-OH...

QUICKLY, MONSIEUR CONSTANT! IT'S A CATASTROPHE... THE APOCALYPSE!
COUGH!

I'M COMING, MADAME JOSETTE, I'M COMING... IT'S NOT HALF SO BAD AS ALL THAT...
NOT SO BAD? THEY'VE DESTROYED IT ALL WITH THEIR BOMBS!
COUGH
COUGH
THOSE WEREN'T ANY BOMBS... THEY WERE MY STONES.
YOUR STONES!? WHAT WERE YOU THINKING? THEY COULD HAVE CRUSHED ME!
I'M SORRY... REALLY... I'LL PUT EVERYTHING RIGHT...
WHY DID YOU DO THIS? WHY... WHY?
THAT'S A MYSTERY TO ME... AT FIRST IT WAS JUST ONE STONE. THEN TWO. THEN MORE AND MORE AND MORE... I DON'T KNOW WHERE THEY CAME FROM.
IT'S GETTING TO BE TOO MUCH FOR ME... I NEED PROFESSIONAL HELP.
BRRRR VRAK
MY GOD, MONSIEUR MAURICE AND HIS RESTAURANT! HE HAS ENOUGH PROBLEMS ALREADY!
CAREFUL!
BUT WE WON'T LET OURSELVES BE BEATEN, MADAME JOSETTE! WE'VE GOT THROUGH WORSE THAN THIS!
VERY WELL, THEN. I'LL GO DOWNSTAIRS.
YOU GO ON, I'LL BE CAREFUL!

HHH... I CAN'T GO ON... SOMEONE HAS TO HELP ME WITH THESE STONES.
I'M COMING UP!
WHAT'S WRONG, CONSTANT? WHAT'S UP WITH THE CROWD?
BLAM
MY FLOOR CAVED IN, I NEED HELP.
ME TOO. WITHOUT GUY ROPES, I'LL FLY OFF!
WE'VE BOTH GOT OUR PROBLEMS, RIGHT? WHERE DID THEY ALL COME FROM?
BLAM
HEAVE
... HO!
AND THERE!
THANK YOU!
YOU SEE, MONSIEUR CONSTANT, IT'LL ALL BE OK.
WE'RE QUICKER THAN THE STONES.
AH, THE POLITICIANS! FINALLY!
?
THAT'S MAYOR SLEECKX, I THINK.
MARY!
SO MANY STONES!

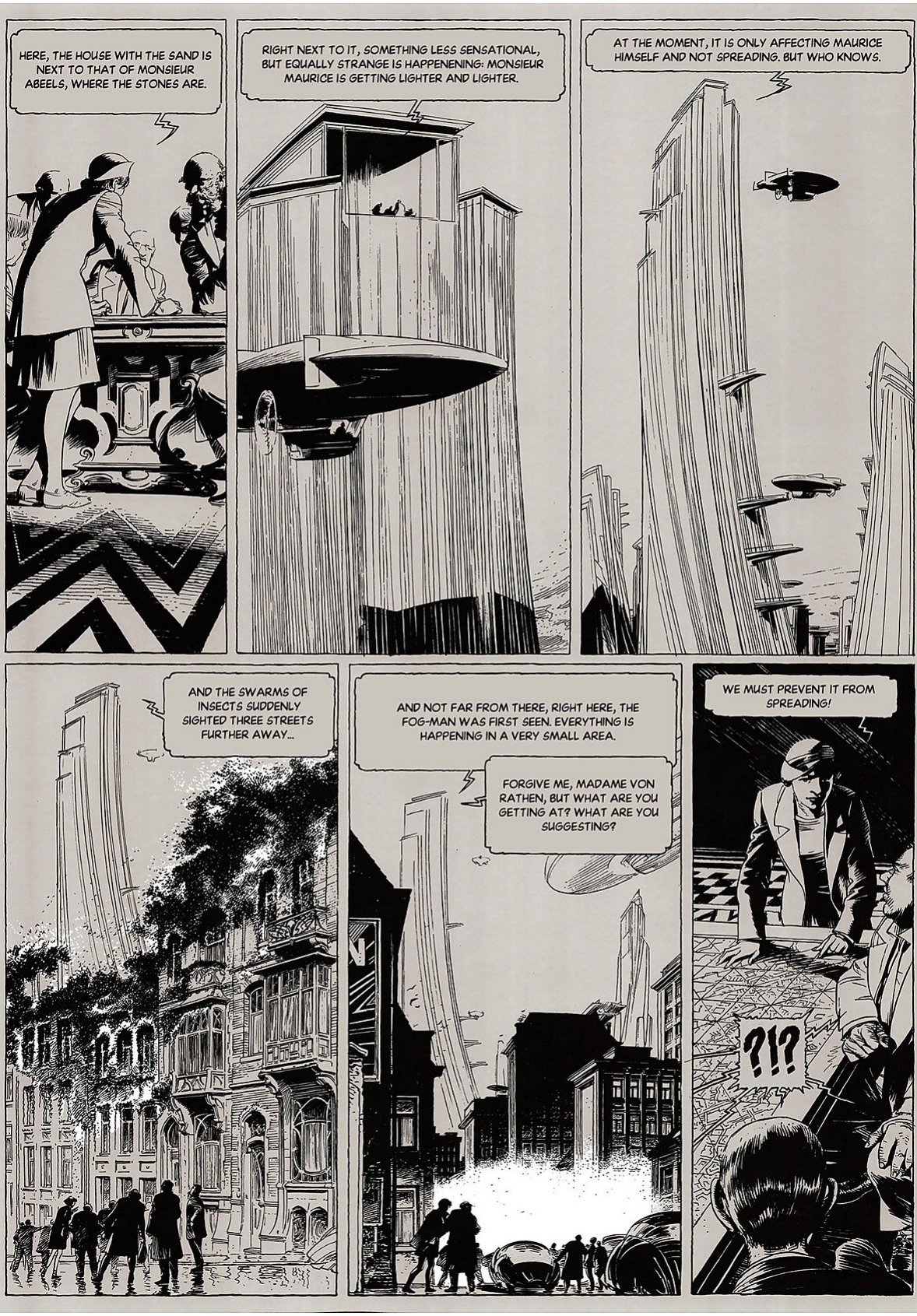
THERE'S SO MANY OF THEM! AND THEY WERE ALL IN ONE APARTMENT?
I'VE BEEN TRYING TO EXPLAIN THAT TO THE DISTRICT MANAGER THIS WHOLE TIME. WITH NO SUCCESS, UNFORTUNATELY.
BLAH
HELLO, MARY! GOOD EVENING, MAYOR. I'M VERY PLEASED TO SEE YOU AGAIN.
BRRRR
AH, MONSIEUR ABEELS! WHAT'S GOING ON HERE? TELL ME...
AHHH
BLAHH
WELL, AS YOU CAN SEE, THE RATE OF APPEARANCE OF NEW STONES HAS DRAMATICALLY INCREASED. I CAN'T EVEN KEEP UP WITH COUNTING THEM.
THERE'S A HUGE HOLE IN MY CEILING!
IF WE DON'T HURRY, THE WHOLE HOUSE WILL COLLAPSE!
BL
DON'T WORRY, WE'VE GOT IT ALL UNDER CONTROL...
WE'LL HAVE THE STONES TAKEN AWAY BY TRUCK.
AND WHAT ABOUT MY CEILING?
GET IN TOUCH WITH YOUR INSURER.
BUT...
SORRY, BUT THERE ARE OTHER, MORE URGENT PROBLEMS ELSEWHERE!
SEE YOU LATER, MARY! YOU MUST COME AND VISIT ME, PLEASE...
BL

I MUST SAY, MADAME VON RATHEN, YOU'VE BEEN IN BRÜSEL FOR TWO DAYS NOW, BUT IT DOESN'T SEEM TO HAVE MADE MUCH DIFFERENCE.
THE SITUATION HAS ONLY BECOME MORE DIRE.
NO-ONE SEEMS TO BE KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT THE PROBLEMS. ANYWAY, I WAS NOTIFIED FAR TOO LATE.
WE INFORMED THE DISTRICT MANAGER, HE DIDN'T KNOW ANYTHING. BUT NOW WE SEEM TO BE ON THE RIGHT TRACK.
BUT, MONSIEUR SLICKS, I ASSURE YOU...
SLEECKX, PLEASE, SLEECKX! I WAS ALREADY SERVING THIS CITY BEFORE YOU WERE EVEN BORN. AND LET ME TELL YOU, BRÜSEL HAS BEATEN FAR WORSE THAN THIS IN HER TIME!
25 YEARS AGO WE SUFFERED DREADFUL FLOODS. WE SURVIVED. AND WE WILL MASTER THESE TROUBLED TIMES TOO.
GOD, IT'S TERRIBLE!
!?
I FEAR THESE PHENOMENA ARE FAR MORE ALARMING EVEN THAN THE FLOODS BRÜSEL EXPERIENCED BACK THEN.
IF IT KEEPS GOING AT THIS RATE, THE WHOLE CITY WILL BE IN CHAOS IN JUST ONE WEEK.
LET'S NOT BE SO DRAMATIC. IN A SITUATION LIKE THIS, IT'S IMPORTANT TO KEEP A COOL HEAD.

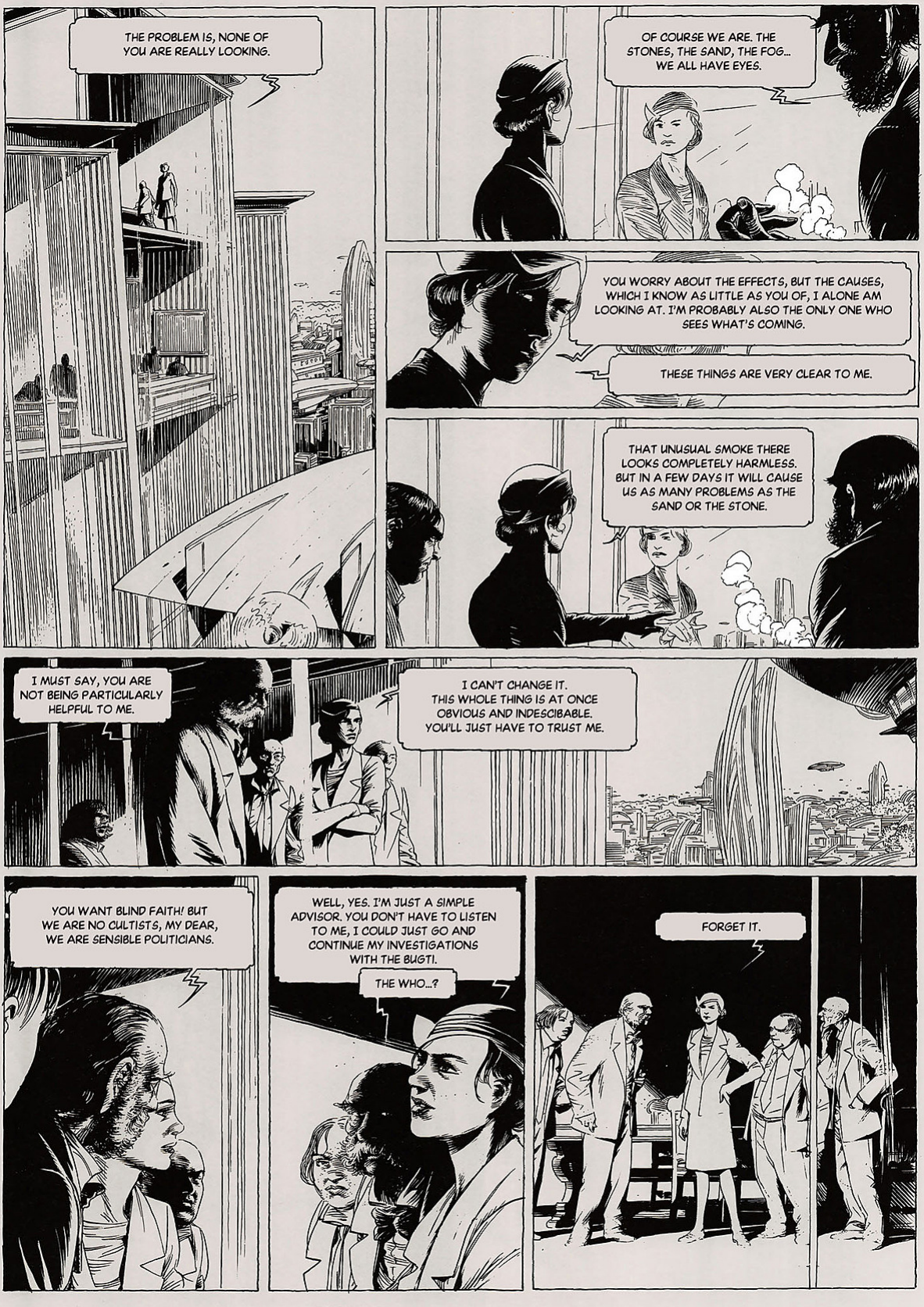
FOR SALE
10:45
A WONDERFUL HOUSE! THE FIRST HOUSE BUILT BY VICTOR HORTA, JUST IMAGINE! IT'S IN ALL THE BOOKS. NOT EXACTLY ART NOUVEAU, BUT...
AHA.
IT'S CLEARLY PROTO-ART NOUVEAU... WITH NEO-POMPEIAN INFLUENCES.
OH, I DON'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT ARCHITECTURE, MY DEAR.
BUT YOU DO HAVE EYES. DO YOU SEE THE DISJOINTED COLOUR SCHEME? THE SAME RED AND GREEN TONES ALL OVER THE PLACE.
COME ON, LET'S BUY IT! I CAN'T TELL YOU HOW HAPPY YOU'D MAKE ME IF WE DID.
YOU'D HAVE TO RENOVATE THE LIGHTING, NEW FURNITURE TOO. BUT THE HOUSE ITSELF IS IN EXCELLENT CONDITION.
IF I MAY ASK, WHY ARE YOU SELLING THE PLACE?
!?
DON'T YOU FIND IT A LITTLE DARK DOWN HERE?
YES, YOU'RE RIGHT.

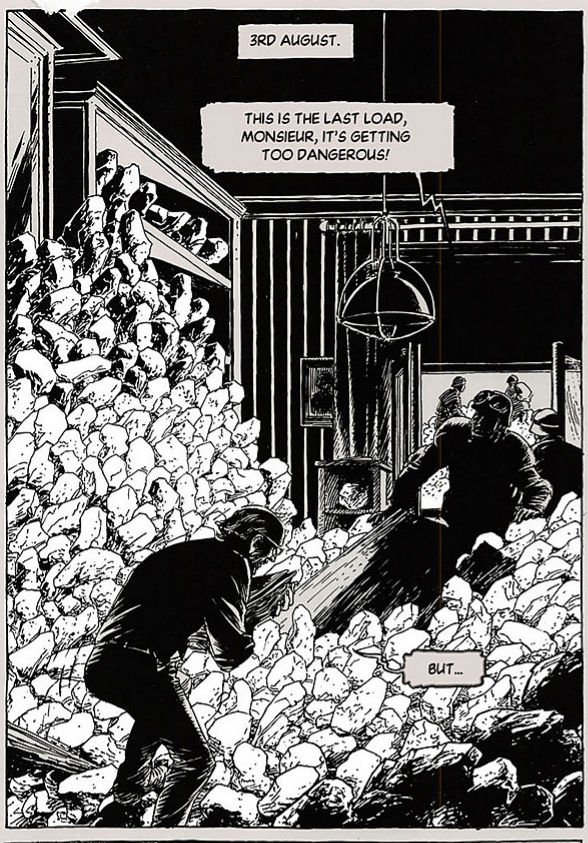
WELL... I HAVE BEEN HAVING SOME FINANCIAL TROUBLE. AND IT'S TOO BIG FOR ME ALONE. BUT I DON'T LIKE HAVING TO SELL IT. I'M STILL VERY ATTACHED TO THE PLACE.
BUT IT'S RATHER LOUD. QUIET IS VERY IMPORTANT TO MY HUSBAND. EVEN THE TRAM IS VERY ANNOYING TO HIM.
IT'S NOT NORMALLY THIS LOUD. I THINK THE NEIGHBOUR IS BUILDING SOMETHING.
PLEASE, THAT'S NOT WHAT A BUILDING SITE SOUNDS LIKE. THOSE ARE VOICES... AND MUSIC... DON'T YOU HEAR IT, THAT PIERCING TUNE?
IS THERE SOMEONE ELSE UPSTAIRS?
ABSOLUTELY NOT, I LIVE ALONE.
YOU SEE, THERE'S NO-ONE HERE.
BUT THE NOISE IS STILL THERE. NOW IT'S COMING FROM DOWNSTAIRS.
I'M SORRY, YOUR HOUSE IS BEAUTIFUL, BUT IT HAS HIDDEN PROBLEMS.
NO, I ASSURE YOU, IT'S...
DON'T TAKE US FOR FOOLS.
I KNEW IT. A HORTA FOR THAT PRICE, THERE HAD TO BE SOMETHING WRONG WITH IT...
FOR SALE

14:20
IN ANY CASE, WE HAVE TO GET RID OF THIS SAND AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. BUT HOW..?
WE COULD TAKE IT TO THE SOMONITE DESERT.
IT'S NOT EXACTLY CLOSE. IT WOULD COST A FORTUNE, AND OUR FINANCES ARE STRETCHED AS IT IS. AND WHAT SHALL WE DO WITH THE STONES?
WE'LL SEND THEM TO PAHRY! THEY'D FIT IN PERFECTLY!
BUT SO MANY? THEY'D NEVER ACCEPT THEM.
HM... MAYBE WE COULD DEMOLISH THE MOST AFFECTED HOUSES. I DON'T KNOW... POSSIBLY...
HA, WELL THAT'S BRILLIANT!
WHAT DO YOU THINK, MADAME VON RATHEN.
THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IS THAT WE ESTABLISH THE EXTENT OF THE PHENOMENA. AT THE MOMENT, THEY ARE ONLY OCCURRING WITHIN A NARROWLY DEFINED AREA.


HERE, THE HOUSE WITH THE SAND IS NEXT TO THAT OF MONSIEUR ABEELS, WHERE THE STONES ARE.
RIGHT NEXT TO IT, SOMETHING LESS SENSATIONAL, BUT EQUALLY STRANGE IS HAPPENENING: MONSIEUR MAURICE IS GETTING LIGHTER AND LIGHTER.
AT THE MOMENT, IT IS ONLY AFFECTING MAURICE HIMSELF AND NOT SPREADING. BUT WHO KNOWS.
AND THE SWARMS OF INSECTS SUDDENLY SIGHTED THREE STREETS FURTHER AWAY...
AND NOT FAR FROM THERE, RIGHT HERE, THE FOG-MAN WAS FIRST SEEN. EVERYTHING IS HAPPENING IN A VERY SMALL AREA.
FORGIVE ME, MADAME VON RATHEN, BUT WHAT ARE YOU GETTING AT? WHAT ARE YOU SUGGESTING?
WE MUST PREVENT IT FROM SPREADING!
?!?

IS IT REALLY SENSIBLE TO SHIP THE STONES AND SAND OFF SOMEWHERE WITHOUT KNOWING WHAT EFFECT THAT WOULD HAVE?
BUT IT'S JUST SAND...!
THAT CAME FROM NOWHERE AND INEXPLICABLY MULTIPLIES.
I THINK WE SHOULD CLOSE OFF THE AFFECTED AREA COMPLETELY WITH A WALL, OR EVEN PUT IT UNDER A TENT. OF COURSE, WE NEED SOME SECURITY IN THE MEANTIME, SUCH A CONSTRUCTION TAKES TIME.
AND WHAT IS YOUR SOLUTION?
A SARCOPHAGUS WOULD HAVE ANOTHER ADVANTAGE...
WHICH IS?
ARE YOU MAD? THIS WOULD AFFECT TENS OF THOUSANDS OF CITIZENS, THERE WOULD BE A PANIC!
AND THE CITY'S IMAGE WOULD BE RUINED.
I DON'T UNDERSTAND YOU, MADAME, YOU'RE ACTING AS IF WE HAD AN EPIDEMIC ON OUR HANDS!
IT'S WORSE THAN AN EPIDEMIC, MONSIEUR SLEECKX. IT'S LIKE A TUMOUR, CONSTANTLY GROWING, SPREADING, MULTIPLYING.
PLEASE! ENOUGH OF THE HORROR STORIES!
WE COULD USE THE SAND AND THE STONES, WE WOULD JUST HAVE TO PROVIDE CEMENT.
?!
THE INHABITANTS WOULD HAVE TO BE EVACUATED AND PLACED UNDER QUARANTINE.


THE PROBLEM IS, NONE OF YOU ARE REALLY LOOKING.
OF COURSE WE ARE. THE STONES, THE SAND, THE FOG... WE ALL HAVE EYES.
YOU WORRY ABOUT THE EFFECTS, BUT THE CAUSES, WHICH I KNOW AS LITTLE AS YOU OF, I ALONE AM LOOKING AT. I'M PROBABLY ALSO THE ONLY ONE WHO SEES WHAT'S COMING.
THESE THINGS ARE VERY CLEAR TO ME.
THAT UNUSUAL SMOKE THERE LOOKS COMPLETELY HARMLESS. BUT IN A FEW DAYS IT WILL CAUSE US AS MANY PROBLEMS AS THE SAND OR THE STONE.
I MUST SAY, YOU ARE NOT BEING PARTICULARLY HELPFUL TO ME.
I CAN'T CHANGE IT. THIS WHOLE THING IS AT ONCE OBVIOUS AND INDESCIBABLE. YOU'LL JUST HAVE TO TRUST ME.
YOU WANT BLIND FAITH! BUT WE ARE NO CULTISTS, MY DEAR, WE ARE SENSIBLE POLITICIANS.
WELL, YES. I'M JUST A SIMPLE ADVISOR. YOU DON'T HAVE TO LISTEN TO ME, I COULD JUST GO AND CONTINUE MY INVESTIGATIONS WITH THE BUGTI.
THE WHO...?
FORGET IT.


3RD AUGUST.
THIS IS THE LAST LOAD, MONSIEUR, IT'S GETTING TOO DANGEROUS!
BUT...

CLAUDINE, WE'LL HAVE TO PHONE THE CLIENTS AND CANCEL THE APPOINTMENT.
DO YOU THINK WE'LL HAVE TO CLOSE?

STOP, MADAME, THE LIFT IS OUT OF SERVICE.
COME ON PEOPLE, STEP ON IT!

HURRY UP! HURRY UP!

DRRIIING
DRRIIIIIIIIING
OKAY, OKAY... I'M COMING.
BAM BAM BAM
SOMEONE'S CERTAINLY IMPATIENT.
!?!
OH MY... IT'S YOU, MONSIEUR KH...
WHAT... WHO...?
I AM AKBAR MORTIZA. AND THIS IS MY BROTHER, KEHAR.
I... I NEED SOMETHING TO DRINK, SOMETHING STRONG... OR I'LL GO MAD.
PLEASE, CALM DOWN!

YOU ARE ELSA AUTRIQUE, ETHNIC ART AND JEWELLERY?
ER, YES.
ELSA AUTRIQUE
ET BIJOUX
ER... WELL, YES, THAT IS... KH...
I... I'M AFRAID THERE WAS AN ACCIDENT... A SERIOUS ONE. IN THE PAPER IT SAID THAT... THAT HE DIED.
WHERE IS OUR FATHER?
GHOLAM MORTIZA KHAN. WE KNOW HE CAME TO SEE YOU.
WE HAVEN'T HEARD FROM HIM SINCE. BAD THINGS ARE HAPPENING IN THE LAND OF THE BUGTI.
I'M SORRY. I OFFER MY SINCEREST CONDOLENCES.
WHERE IS HIS BODY? WE WANT TO SEE HIS BODY.
I... I DON'T KNOW WHERE IT IS...
MAYBE HE WAS ALREADY BURIED. OR HE MIGHT BE IN THE CENTRAL MORGUE.
WE MUST BRING HIS ASHES BACK TO THE LAND OF THE BUGTI.

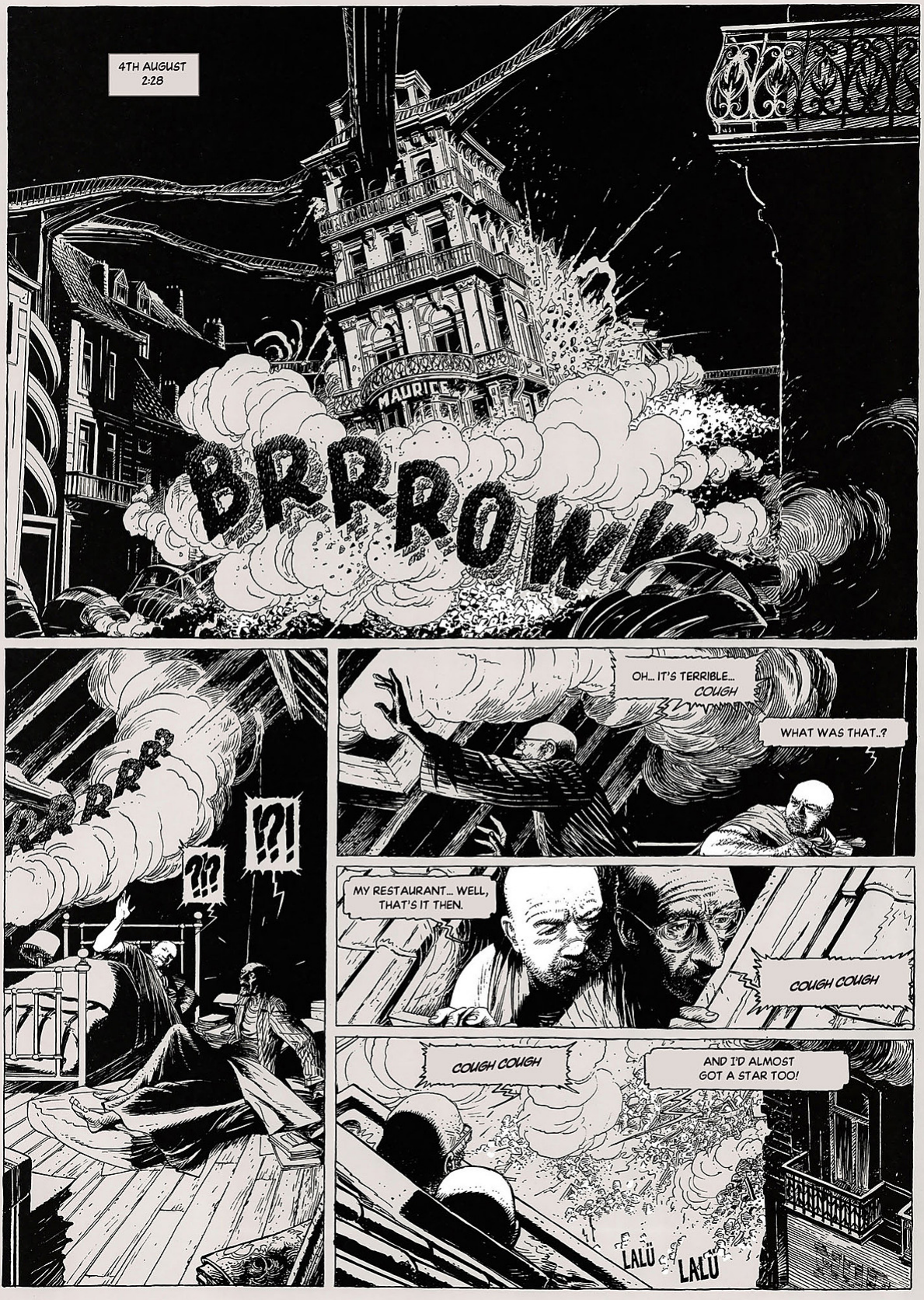
YOU THOUGHT I WAS MAD, BRINGING THIS STONE ALL THE WAY OVER HERE. BUT I'VE BEEN HERE THREE HOURS NOW AND NOTHING'S HAPPENED. THERE'S THE PROOF.
PROOF OF WHAT?
THAT IT HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH ME, BUT WITH MY APARTMENT. I'M SURE IT'S DOWN TO THE LOCATION.
STILL, I'D RATHER YOU TAKE IT WITH YOU.
I ALREADY HAD TO CLOSE THE RESTAURANT, NOW I'D JUST LIKE TO HAVE A FEW DAYS OF PEACE.
AND SO YOU'RE HIDING UP HERE?
YES. THE ATTIC IS THE ONLY PLACE WHERE I FEEL SOMEWHAT COMFORTABLE. EVERY DAY I HAD TO MOVE UP A FLOOR. AND THIS IS THE HIGHEST I CAN GET. I MIGHT EVEN BE PUTTING ON WEIGHT AGAIN.
YOU KEEP FLOATING HIGHER AND HIGHER. YOU'RE WEAKENING GRAVITY.
ARE YOU SERIOUS?
YES, BUT DON'T PANIC. IT'S HAPPENING GRADUALLY, EVEN IF IT IS CONTINUOUS. YOU COULD LIVE IN ONE OF THE TOWERS. BUT YOU'D HAVE TO MOVE EVERY DAY.
THERE'S THE HOTERL PERSENVAL, WHERE MARY VON RATHER LIVES, YOU KNOW...
AND HOW SHOULD I PAY FOR THAT? UNLESS, THAT IS, SHE LETS ME STAY IN HER ROOM!
UNLIKELY.
WE'D HAVE TO KNOW AT WHAT ALTITUDE YOU STOP. WE COULD EXPERIMENT. DO YOU HAVE A ROPE?
WHAT, DO YOU WANT TO HANG ME? THAT MIGHT NOT GO SO WELL!

I WANT TO FIND THE IDEAL HEIGHT, WHERE YOUR POSITION IS STABLE. THEN WE COULD PLOT OF A GRAPH OF ANY VARIATION.
DO YOU REALLY THINK...?
FROM TOP DOG TO GUINEA PIG...
YOU SEE, WE DON'T EVEN NEED A ROPE.
STILL, DON'T LET GO!
YOU'RE RIGHT, I'M AT EQUILIBRIUM RIGHT HERE.
TO BE HONEST, I FEEL REALLY GOOD!

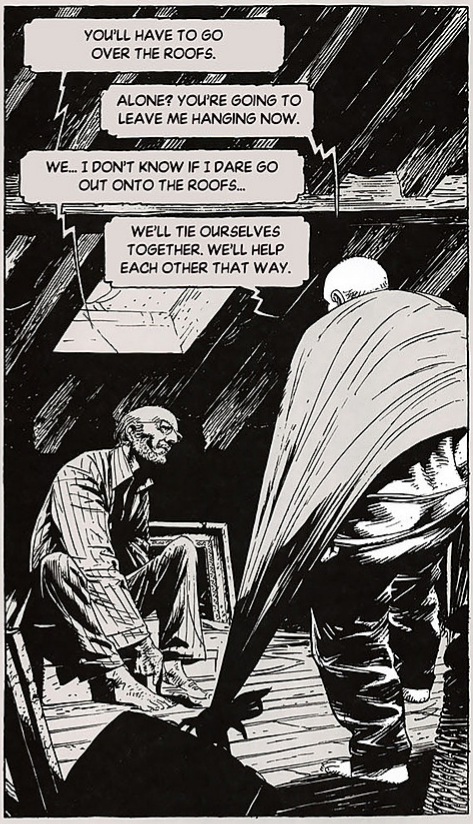
I CAME AS QUICKLY AS I COULD. NOW, PLEASE TELL ME WHAT'S UP.
IT'S NOT AS SIMPLE AS THAT... MY COLLEAGUE IS STILL IN SHOCK.
WE WERE SITTING AND PLAYING CARDS, QUITE INNOCENTLY, WHEN ALL OF A SUDDEN HE WAS STANDING IN FRONT OF US IN THE FLESH, TWICE, EVEN!
TWO SAVAGES WITH DESERT BEARDS! UNBELIEVABLE. WE COULDN'T DEFEND OURSELVES!
BUGTI...
THEY KNEW EXACTLY WHO THEY WERE LOOKING FOR. BUT BY THE TIME WE'D GOT THE KEY...
... AND OPENED THE CORRECT DRAWER...
... THEY'D ALREADY TAKEN EVERYTHING APART!
I'VE NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE IT.
WHO KNOWS WHERE THEY ARE NOW.

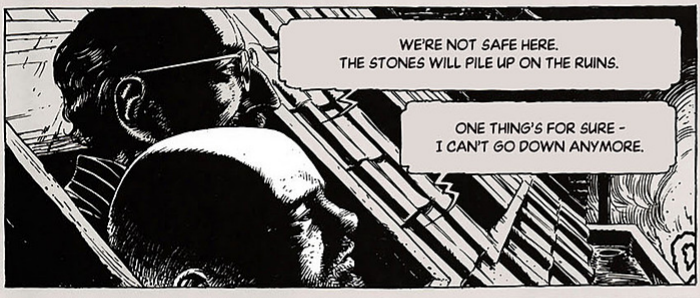
WHAT'S THIS? HOPEFULLY THE SANDSTORM HASN'T...
AAAH

WH-WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE...
OUR FATHER WORE A NAWABY AT HIS THROAT. LOOK, THE AURA IS STILL THERE.
I'M SORRY... I DON'T SEE ANYTHING.
BUT WE BUGTI SEE IT, THAT IS ENOUGH.
WHERE IS THE NAWABY?
I... I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU MEAN... WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
YES, I THINK HE DID HAVE A NECKLACE... A PRETTY LITTLE THING.
AND WHERE IS THIS "THING"?
I... I DON'T KNOW, TRULY. MAYBE SOMEONE STOLE IT. I'VE LOST A LOT OF THINGS LIKE THAT.
WE CANNOT RETURN TO THE LAND OF THE BUGTI WITHOUT THE NAWABY. ORDER CANNOT BE RESTORED WITHOUT THE NAWABY.
WE WILL STAY HERE WITH OUT FATHER UNTIL THE "THING" IS HERE ONCE MORE.
BUT THAT'S NOT POSSIBLE!
COME, WE WILL TAKE THE BODY OUTSIDE.

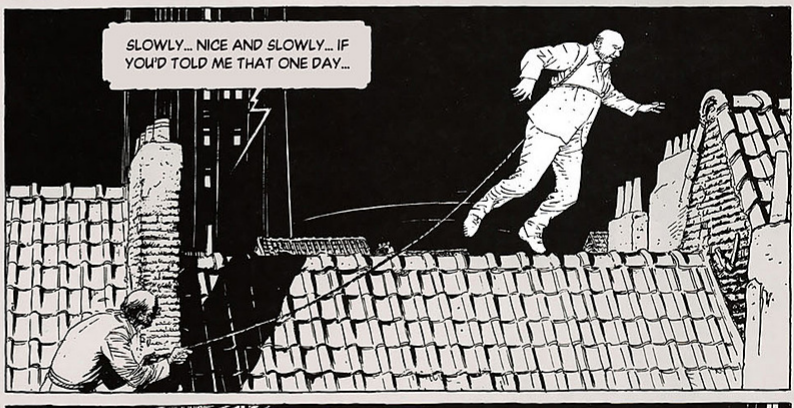

4TH AUGUST
2:28
MAURICE
BRRROWL
BRRR?
?!
?!
OH... IT'S TERRIBLE...
COUGH
WHAT WAS THAT..?
MY RESTAURANT... WELL, THAT'S IT THEN.
COUGH COUGH
COUGH COUGH
AND I'D ALMOST GOT A STAR TOO!
LALÜ
LALÜ

AOOOUH!
HELP! HELP!
MAMA!
BOMBS! THOSE WERE BOMBS! WE'RE BEING BOMBED!
LALÜ LALÜ

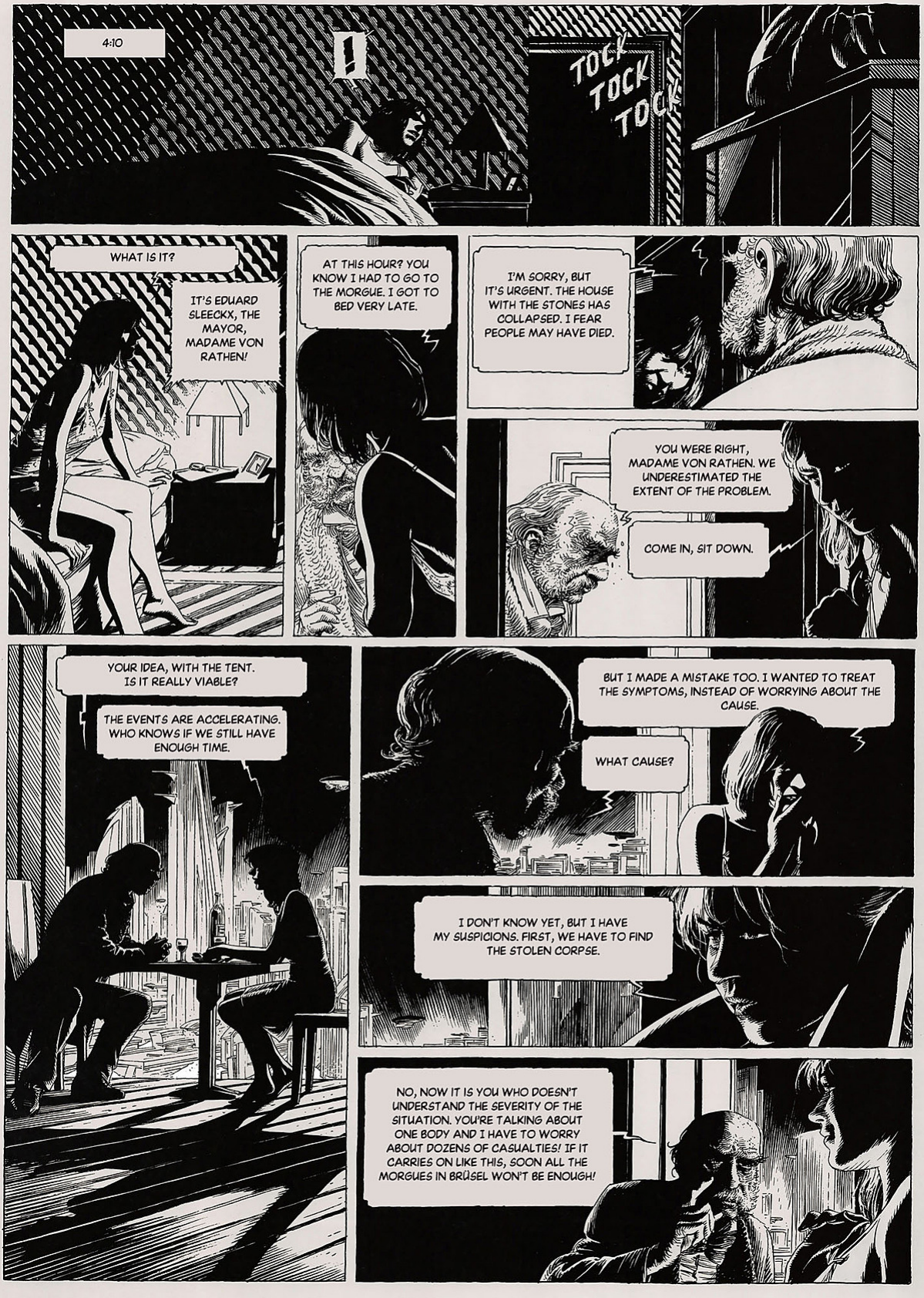

YOU'LL HAVE TO GO OVER THE ROOFS.
ALONE? YOU'RE GOING TO LEAVE ME HANGING NOW.
WE... I DON'T KNOW IF I DARE GO OUT ONTO THE ROOFS...
WE'LL TIE OURSELVES TOGETHER. WE'LL HELP EACH OTHER THAT WAY.


WE'RE NOT SAFE HERE. THE STONES WILL PILE UP ON THE RUINS.
ONE THING'S FOR SURE - I CAN'T GO DOWN ANYMORE.

HEAVENS...


SLOWLY... NICE AND SLOWLY... IF YOU'D TOLD ME THAT ONE DAY...

DON'T WORRY, CONSTANT, I'VE GOT IT UNDER CONTROL!


4:10
TOCK TOCK TOCK
WHAT IS IT?
IT'S EDUARD SLEECKX, THE MAYOR, MADAME VON RATHEN!
AT THIS HOUR? YOU KNOW I HAD TO GO TO THE MORGUE. I GOT TO BED VERY LATE.
I'M SORRY, BUT IT'S URGENT. THE HOUSE WITH THE STONES HAS COLLAPSED. I FEAR PEOPLE MAY HAVE DIED.
YOU WERE RIGHT, MADAME VON RATHEN. WE UNDERESTIMATED THE EXTENT OF THE PROBLEM.
COME IN, SIT DOWN.
YOUR IDEA, WITH THE TENT. IS IT REALLY VIABLE?
THE EVENTS ARE ACCELERATING. WHO KNOWS IF WE STILL HAVE ENOUGH TIME.
BUT I MADE A MISTAKE TOO. I WANTED TO TREAT THE SYMPTOMS, INSTEAD OF WORRYING ABOUT THE CAUSE.
WHAT CAUSE?
I DON'T KNOW YET, BUT I HAVE MY SUSPICIONS. FIRST, WE HAVE TO FIND THE STOLEN CORPSE.
NO, NOW IT IS YOU WHO DOESN'T UNDERSTAND THE SEVERITY OF THE SITUATION. YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT ONE BODY AND I HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT DOZENS OF CASUALTIES! IF IT CARRIES ON LIKE THIS, SOON ALL THE MORGUES IN BRÜSEL WON'T BE ENOUGH!

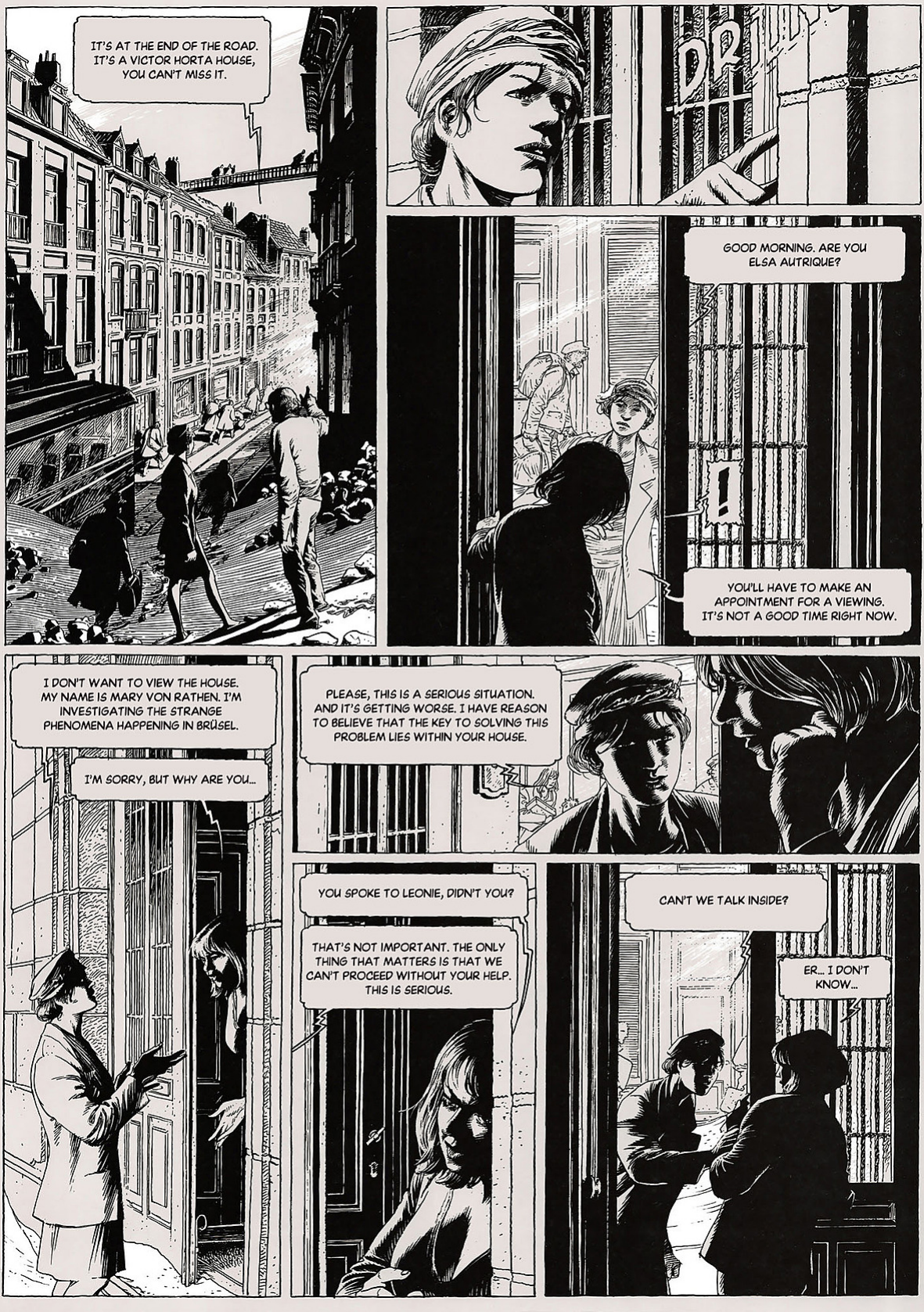
SLOWLY, SLOWLY! I'M NOT A GAZELLE!
HE... I DON'T LIKE THIS ONE BIT!
CALM DOWN, OLD MAN. I'M DOING BRILLIANTLY ANYWAY.
I CAN HAVE A LITTLE FUN LIKE THIS...
... MIGHT EVEN LOSE A BIT OF WEIGHT!
OH, NOW IT'S GETTING MORE COMPLICATED.
CAREFUL, CONSTANT, I'M JUMPING!
UHH!
AAAAA

OOPS-A-DAISY!
HEY, WHAT ARE YOU DOING UP THERE?!
UNBELIEVABLE. IT'S AS IF I'M FALLING IN SLOW MOTION.
IF YOU HAD A BIT MORE BOUYANCY...
... WE'D BE COMPLETELY BALANCED.
PAY ATTENTION! THIS ISN'T THE TIME TO BE MAKING OBSERVATIONS!
!
!
ZZZZZZZ

AH... LIKE A FLOWER PETAL.
UHH!!!
HUPP!
THIS IS A NICE LITTLE PLACE. WE'LL TAKE A BREAK HERE FOR A MOMENT.
IT'S ABSOLUTELY INCREDIBLE.
OH, I'M SLOWLY GETTING USED TO IT. ACTUALLY, IT'S QUITE PLEASANT.
I DON'T THINK SO. ELSA AUTRIQUE. YOU SAW HER TOO, DIDN'T YOU? I'D NEVER HAVE EXPECTED THAT OF HER... TWO AT THE SAME TIME!!
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
WELL, SHE HAD TWO SAVAGES IN HER BED. THEY LOOKED LIKE THAT DEAD GUY, THE BUGTI!
NONSENSE! I KNOW ELSA QUITE WELL. SHE'D NEVER DO ANYTHING LIKE THAT. YOU MUST BE HALLUCINATING. ALL THIS HAS STARTED GETTING TO YOU.
BUT IT'S TRUE. AND I HAVE A FEELING THAT IT'S IMPORTANT TOO.
FINE, CONSTANT. BUT WE WON'T BE STAYING ON THIS TREE ALL NIGHT.
I'M GETTING HUNGRY.

OK, YOU TAKE THE ROPE OFF. I'LL KEEP MINE, YOU NEVER KNOW.
ARE YOU SURE..?
OF COURSE, I CAN MAKE IT BACK TO THE ROOF ALONE.
BRING ME SOME FOOD AS SOON AS YOU CAN, OK? AND A BLANKET IF YOU CAN.
AND SOMETHING PROPER TO DRINK!
I'LL COME BACK AS QUICK AS I CAN!
I'M LOOKING FOR MADAME VON RATHEN. DO YOU KNOW WHERE SHE IS?
SHE WAS HERE A COUPLE OF MINUTES AGO, WITH THE MAYOR.

SORRY...
YOU'RE WASTING YOUR TIME. THIS WALL IS POINTLESS.
YOU SHOULD HAVE TOLD US. YOU YOURSELF TOLD US TO BUILD IT.
BUT THAT WAS TWO DAYS AGO!
VON RATHEN?
NO IDEA.
THAT'S IT! WILD HORSES COULDN'T KEEP ME HERE!
THIS IS THE DEVIL'S CITY!
?
MARY! MARY!
CONSTANT?... WHAT...
I NEED... I NEED TO TELL YOU SOMETHING VERY IMPORTANT...
... YES, TWO BUGTI. JUST LIKE THE DEAD ONE. I ONLY SAW THEM BRIEFLY, BUT...
THANK YOU, CONSTANT. THAT'S THE MOST USEFUL PIECE OF INFORMATION I'VE GOT SO FAR.

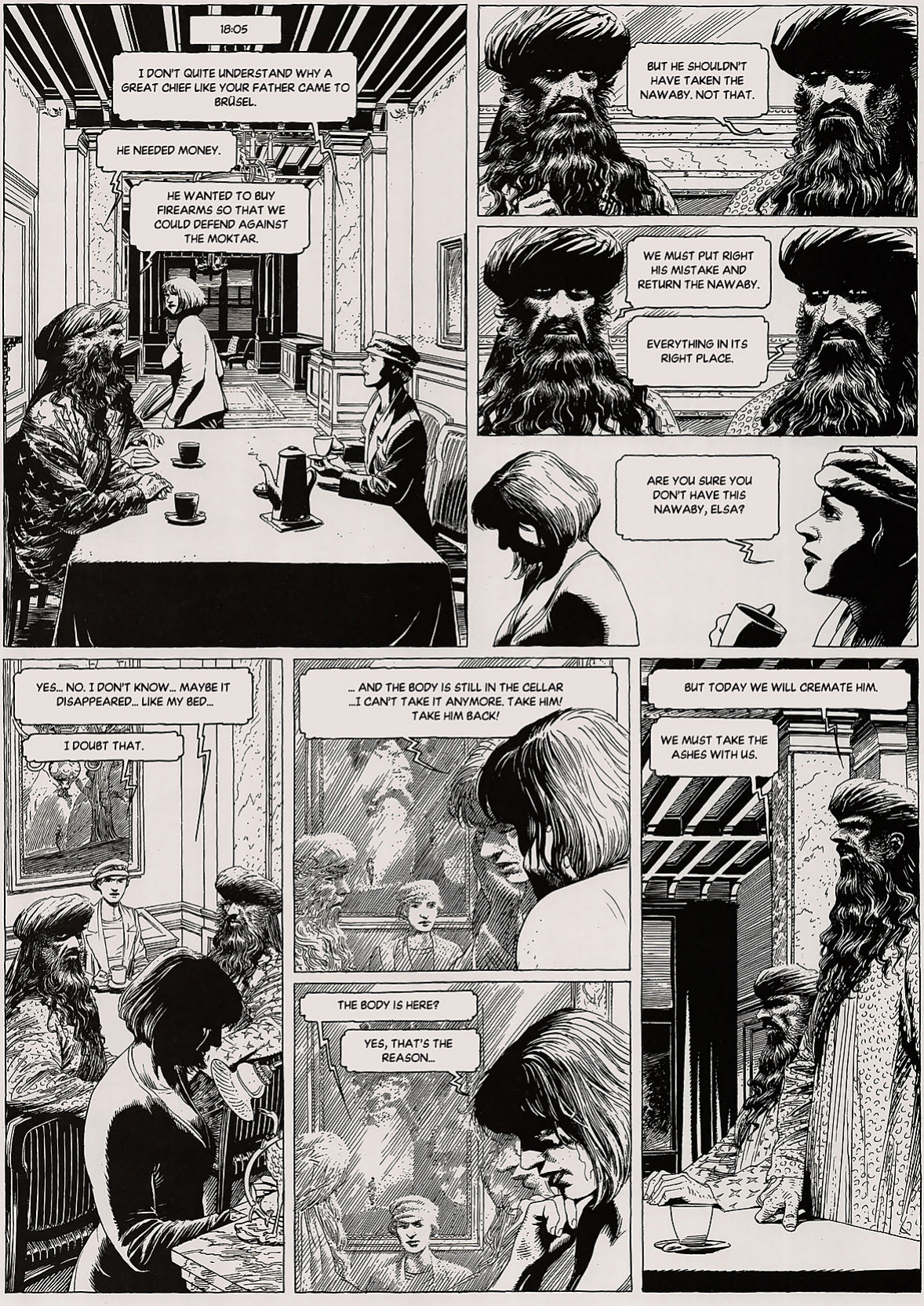

IT'S AT THE END OF THE ROAD. IT'S A VICTOR HORTA HOUSE, YOU CAN'T MISS IT.
DRI
GOOD MORNING. ARE YOU ELSA AUTRIQUE?
!
YOU'LL HAVE TO MAKE AN APPOINTMENT FOR A VIEWING. IT'S NOT A GOOD TIME RIGHT NOW.
I DON'T WANT TO VIEW THE HOUSE. MY NAME IS MARY VON RATHEN. I'M INVESTIGATING THE STRANGE PHENOMENA HAPPENING IN BRÜSEL.
I'M SORRY, BUT WHY ARE YOU...
PLEASE, THIS IS A SERIOUS SITUATION. AND IT'S GETTING WORSE. I HAVE REASON TO BELIEVE THAT THE KEY TO SOLVING THIS PROBLEM LIES WITHIN YOUR HOUSE.
YOU SPOKE TO LEONIE, DIDN'T YOU?
THAT'S NOT IMPORTANT. THE ONLY THING THAT MATTERS IS THAT WE CAN'T PROCEED WITHOUT YOUR HELP. THIS IS SERIOUS.
CAN'T WE TALK INSIDE?
ER... I DON'T KNOW...

YOU'RE RIGHT, STRANGE THINGS ARE HAPPENING HERE. I HEAR FOOTSTEPS, CONVERSATIONS IN STRANGE LANGUAGES... I GET THE FEELING I'M BEING WATCHED...
AND WHEN DO THESE THINGS HAPPEN? AT NIGHT?
NO, NOT JUST AT NIGHT...
ON SOME DAYS, ABSOLUTELY NOTHING HAPPENS. AT THE BEGINNING OF THE WEEK, IT'S MOSTLY QUIET, LIKE NOW. BUT SATURDAYS AND SUNDAYS AND SOMETIMES AT NIGHT IT'S VERY LOUD. AND FURNITURE AND OTHER THINGS ARE VANISHING TOO.
AS IF THERE WERE INVISIBLE PEOPLE HERE... YOU MUST THINK I'M MAD.
FAR FROM IT, ELSA, JUST THE OPPOSITE.
I CAN'T STAND IT IN THIS HOUSE ANYMORE! I HAVE TO GET OUT OF HERE. BUT IT'S ALL I OWN. AND WITH ALL THESE GOINGS-ON I'LL NEVER BE ABLE TO SELL.
YOU KNOW THIS MAN, DON'T YOU? HE OFFERED TO SELL YOU JEWELLERY.
YES... AND I THINK THAT'S WHAT STARTED ALL THIS.
HAVE YOU HAD ANY CONTACT WITH ANY BUGTI SINCE?
UH... NO... I...
?

ELSA!
UH... WHAT... WHAT IS IT?
I THINK THESE GENTLEMEN HAVE ANSWERED MY QUESTION.
I... I CAN EXPLAIN... THESE ARE THE SONS OF...
HAVE YOU SEEN THE ROOM, ELSA?
... THE ROOM?
COME.
THEY WERE LOST, YOU UNDERSTAND. I COULDN'T THINK OF ANYTHING TO DO BUT TO PUT THEM UP IN THIS HOUSE.
DON'T WORRY. THE PROBLEM LIES ELSEWHERE.
ELSA, THE BED...
HUH... WHAT DID YOU DO WITH THE BED?!
WE DIDN'T DO ANYTHING.
THE NAWABY! IT WAS THE NAWABY!
I SHOULD HAVE COME MUCH SOONER.

I DON'T BELIEVE IT... WHAT'S GOING ON HERE? HE SAID HE WOULD BE HERE!
AH, THERE HE IS! ABOUT TIME TOO!
STRANGE, NO-ONE PAYS ANY ATTENTION TO ME, THEY JUST RUN AWAY. SOON WE'LL BE THE ONLY BRÜSELERS LEFT.
AND WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN ALL THIS TIME? I'VE BEEN LOOKING FOR YOU FOR HALF AN HOUR.
IT WASN'T ON PURPOSE. I'M DRIFTING OFF. AT FIRST I THOUGHT I WAS CLIMBING, BUT IT'S LIKE I'M BEING PULLED OFF SOMEWHERE...
THROW ME THE ROPE DOWN!
I'VE FOUND SOMETHING TO LENGTHEN IT, AND I'M GOOD WITH KNOTS.
I'M LETTING GO! HOLD THE ROPE TIGHT!
MY GOD...
IF IT GOES ON LIKE THIS I'LL BE OUT IN THE STICKS BEFORE LONG!

I'M HUNGRY, CONSTANT.
I KNOW, MAURICE.
AS SOON AS I CAN, I'LL...
HEY, I KNOW YOU!
OH... HELLO MONSIEUR DYRIOUX.
TAKES A LOT TO MOVE YOU OUT, HUH?
BUT I'M JUST THE SAME...
I'M NOT ONE TO BOLT AND LEAVE MY TREASURES BEHIND.
YOU LOOK TIRED. WAIT, LET ME HELP YOU...
THIS IS MAURICE, A FRIEND. HE'S LOST A LOT OF WEIGHT.
IF I DON'T GET SOMETHING TO EAT SOON, I'LL LOSE EVEN MORE!
YES, YES, MAURICE. WE'RE JUST LOOKING FOR A PLACE TO TIE YOU UP.
THAT'D BE A LOAD OFF MY MIND.
GOOD THAT I BUMPED INTO YOU. WE'RE OBVIOUSLY NOT THE ONLY ONES HAVING PROBLEMS. THERE'S NEWS FROM BOULACHISTAN, THE SITUATION LOOKS SERIOUS OVER THERE.

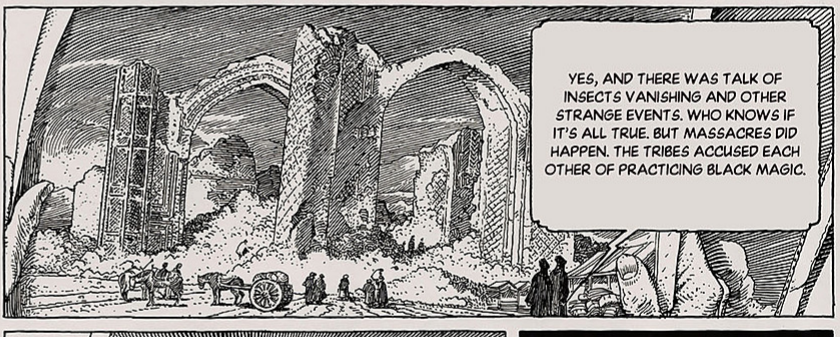

18:05
I DON'T QUITE UNDERSTAND WHY A GREAT CHIEF LIKE YOUR FATHER CAME TO BRÜSEL.
HE NEEDED MONEY.
HE WANTED TO BUY FIREARMS SO THAT WE COULD DEFEND AGAINST THE MOKTAR.
BUT HE SHOULDN'T HAVE TAKEN THE NAWABY. NOT THAT.
WE MUST PUT RIGHT HIS MISTAKE AND RETURN THE NAWABY.
EVERYTHING IN ITS RIGHT PLACE.
ARE YOU SURE YOU DON'T HAVE THIS NAWABY, ELSA?
YES... NO. I DON'T KNOW... MAYBE IT DISAPPEARED... LIKE MY BED...
I DOUBT THAT.
... AND THE BODY IS STILL IN THE CELLAR ...I CAN'T TAKE IT ANYMORE. TAKE HIM! TAKE HIM BACK!
THE BODY IS HERE?
YES, THAT'S THE REASON...
BUT TODAY WE WILL CREMATE HIM.
WE MUST TAKE THE ASHES WITH US.

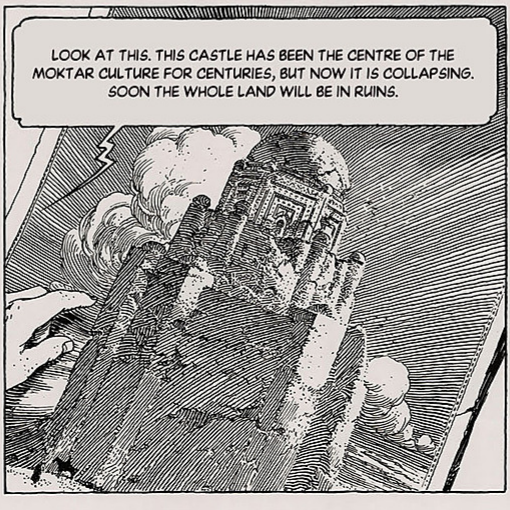
COME WITH ME, I HAVE SOME NEW INFORMATION.

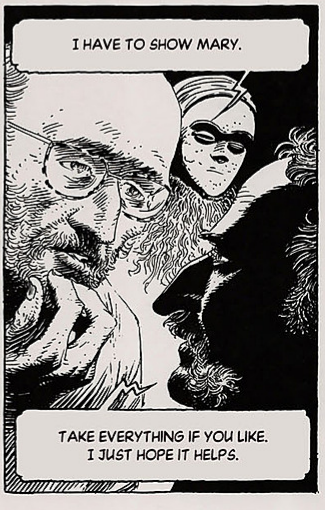
THERE HAS BEEN A BALANCE BETWEEN THE BUGTI AND THE NEIGHBOURING MOKTAR FOR AGES. THERE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN SKIRMISHES, BUT THEY WERE MORE OF A SPORT THAN REAL BATTLE. THE APPEARANCE OF FIREARM CAUSED A CATASTROPHE HOWEVER...

THE PEOPLES BEGAN AN ARMS RACE THAT PLUNGED THE ENTIRE REGION INTO CHAOS. THEN GHOLAM MORTIZA KHAN MURDERED THE CHIEF OF THE MOKTAR...
THE KHAN WHO DIED HERE IN BRÜSEL?

YES, HIM. FIRST THE MURDER, THEN THE THEFT OF THE NAWABY SACRED TO THE MOKTAR. A SERIES OF NATURAL DISASTERS FOLLOWED, STONE WALLS COLLAPSED, SANDSTORMS RAGED, THERE WERE LANDSLIDES.
STONE AND SAND, JUST LIKE HERE.


YES, AND THERE WAS TALK OF INSECTS VANISHING AND OTHER STRANGE EVENTS. WHO KNOWS IF IT'S ALL TRUE. BUT MASSACRES DID HAPPEN. THE TRIBES ACCUSED EACH OTHER OF PRACTICING BLACK MAGIC.


LOOK AT THIS. THIS CASTLE HAS BEEN THE CENTRE OF THE MOKTAR CULTURE FOR CENTURIES, BUT NOW IT IS COLLAPSING. SOON THE WHOLE LAND WILL BE IN RUINS.


I HAVE TO SHOW MARY.
TAKE EVERYTHING IF YOU LIKE. I JUST HOPE IT HELPS.

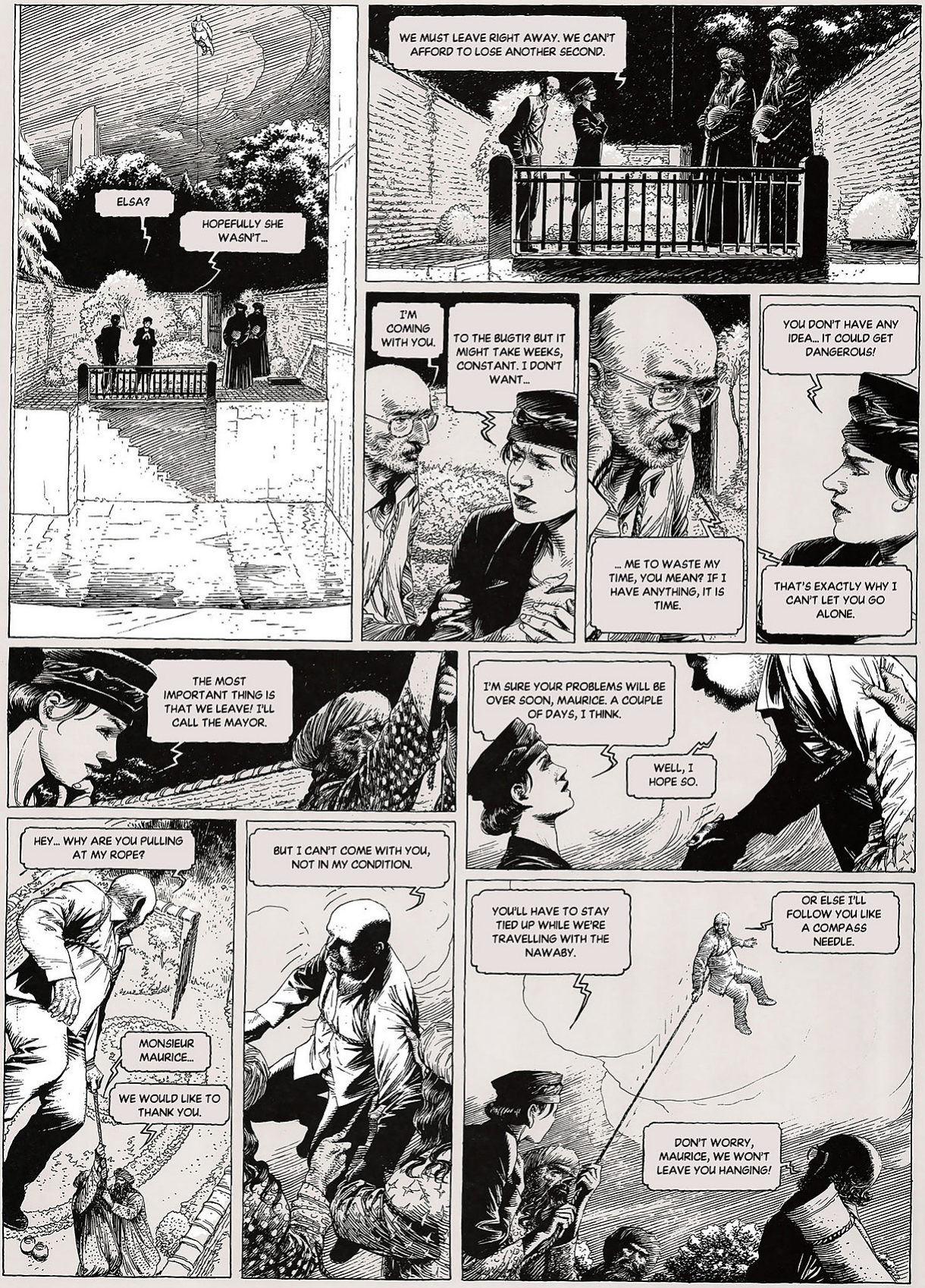
5TH AUGUST
00:05
SEE YOU LATER.
I DON'T FEEL WELL... I... I'LL GO INSIDE AND MAKE MYSELF SOMETHING TO DRINK.
WE'LL SEE EACH OTHER LATER, ELSA. HAVE SOME REST.
UH, MADE IT! BUT I SHOULD HAVE TALKED TO THAT MARY A LOT SOONER.
OH NO, NOT MY CARPET!
THE NICEST IN THE WHOLE HOUSE...
HELP! HELP! GOD HELP ME

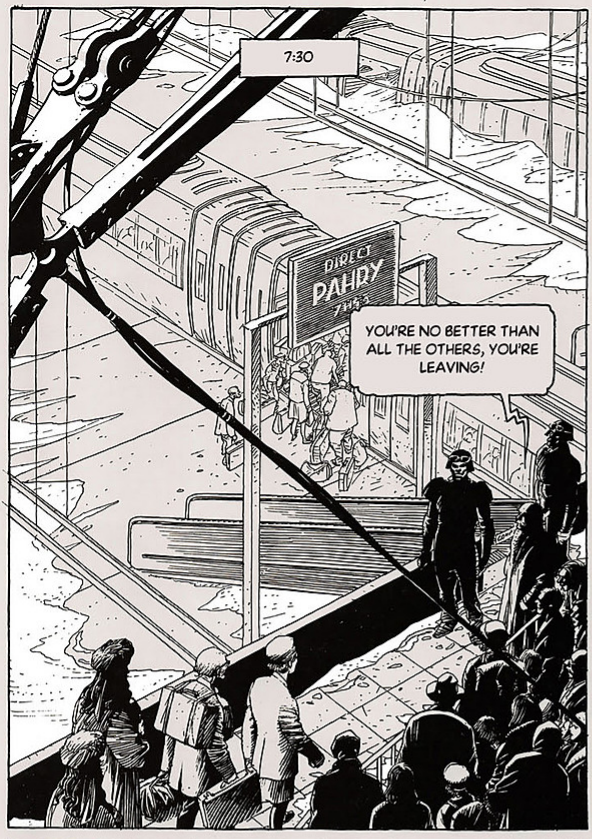
IT'S NOT MUCH FURTHER. HOPEFULLY SHE'S STILL IN THE AUTRIQUE HOUSE...
YOU'RE ALWAYS THINKING OF THIS MARY...
WHAT'S GOING ON THERE? WHAT KIND OF AN IDIOT BURNS THINGS IN THE PARK?
LET'S TAKE A LOOK.
OH, WHAT ARE THEY DOING?
IT'S THE BUGTI! THE TWO I TOLD YOU ABOUT.
?
HELLO MARY, WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?
SHHH... THEY'RE CREMATING THEIR FATHER.
I SPOKE TO DYRIOUX, FROM THE GALLERY OF DISTANT LANDS. HE HAS IMPORTANT INFORMATION.
I DON'T KNOW WHAT COULD BE MORE IMPORTANT RIGHT NOW THAN FINDING THE NAWABY.
THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT HE WAS TALKING ABOUT!

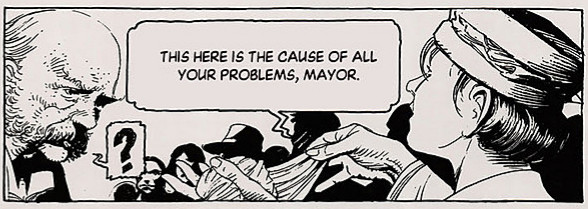
THERE, THE FLYING MAN..!
THANK THE HEAVENS.
WHAT'S WRONG?
THE FLYING MAN, JUST LOOK!
THE NAWABY IS DRAWING HIM IN.
HE WILL LEAD US TO IT.
MAYBE THEY'RE RIGHT. WE JUST NEED TO LET MAURICE GO.
YOU'RE QUITE COMFORTABLE WITH ABSURDITIES, AREN'T YOU?
FIRST THEY HOLD ME BACK, THEN THEY RUN AFTER ME... I FEEL LIKE A WEATHERCOCK.
NOT SO FAST, MAURICE!
YOU'RE SO FUNNY...
LET US GATHER THE ASHES.
LET THE ROPE GO SLACK. I'M NOT RISING ANYMORE.
YOU SURE?

WHERE IS HE LEADING US?
HE'S BACK OVER THERE.
!
SO FAR ALREADY?
WHAT DO YOU HAVE THERE?
THAT'S IT! THE ROOT OF ALL EVIL!
THE NAWABY! UNBELIEVABLE...
MAURICE! MARY'S FOUND THE NAWABY!
WITH YOUR HELP, MAURICE!
FINALLY!
AND HERE COME ELSA'S FRIENDS.
THE NAWABY!
THAT'S IT!
IT BELONGS TO US.
GIVE IT TO US!

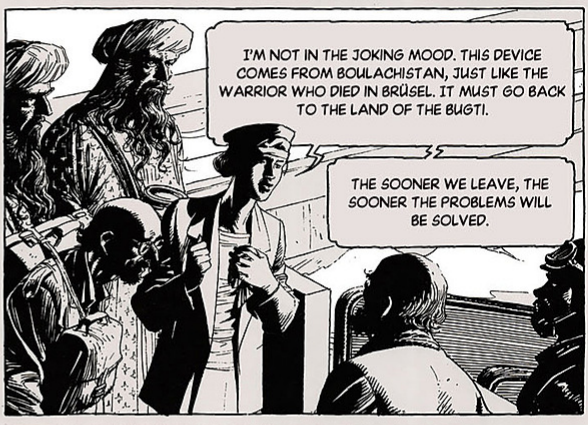
KEEP CALM, GENTLEMEN. SURELY YOU DON'T WANT...
I FOUND IT, AND I'LL GIVE IT BACK.
ACTUALLY, IT BELONGS TO THE MOKTAR.
CALM DOWN, WE'LL TRAVEL TO BOULACHISTAN TOGETHER.
THAT REALLY IS THE LIMIT. I'M STARTING TO FEEL LIKE A HUNTING DOG.
THE HOUSE!
?
!
!
!

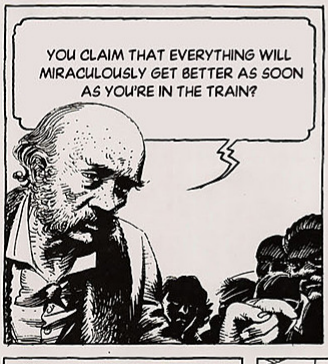

ELSA?
HOPEFULLY SHE WASN'T...
WE MUST LEAVE RIGHT AWAY. WE CAN'T AFFORD TO LOSE ANOTHER SECOND.
I'M COMING WITH YOU.
TO THE BUGTI? BUT IT MIGHT TAKE WEEKS, CONSTANT. I DON'T WANT...
... ME TO WASTE MY TIME, YOU MEAN? IF I HAVE ANYTHING, IT IS TIME.
YOU DON'T HAVE ANY IDEA... IT COULD GET DANGEROUS!
THAT'S EXACTLY WHY I CAN'T LET YOU GO ALONE.
THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IS THAT WE LEAVE! I'LL CALL THE MAYOR.
I'M SURE YOUR PROBLEMS WILL BE OVER SOON, MAURICE. A COUPLE OF DAYS, I THINK.
WELL, I HOPE SO.
HEY... WHY ARE YOU PULLING AT MY ROPE?
MONSIEUR MAURICE...
WE WOULD LIKE TO THANK YOU.
BUT I CAN'T COME WITH YOU, NOT IN MY CONDITION.
YOU'LL HAVE TO STAY TIED UP WHILE WE'RE TRAVELLING WITH THE NAWABY.
OR ELSE I'LL FOLLOW YOU LIKE A COMPASS NEEDLE.
DON'T WORRY, MAURICE, WE WON'T LEAVE YOU HANGING!


7:30
DIRECT
PAHRY
YOU'RE NO BETTER THAN ALL THE OTHERS, YOU'RE LEAVING!

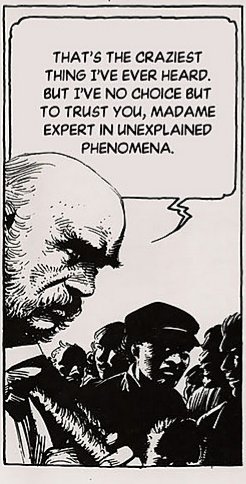

THIS HERE IS THE CAUSE OF ALL YOUR PROBLEMS, MAYOR.
?

WHAT, THIS? IS THIS MEANT TO BE A JOKE? I'VE HEARD A LOT OF NONSENSE IN MY TIME, BUT THIS...

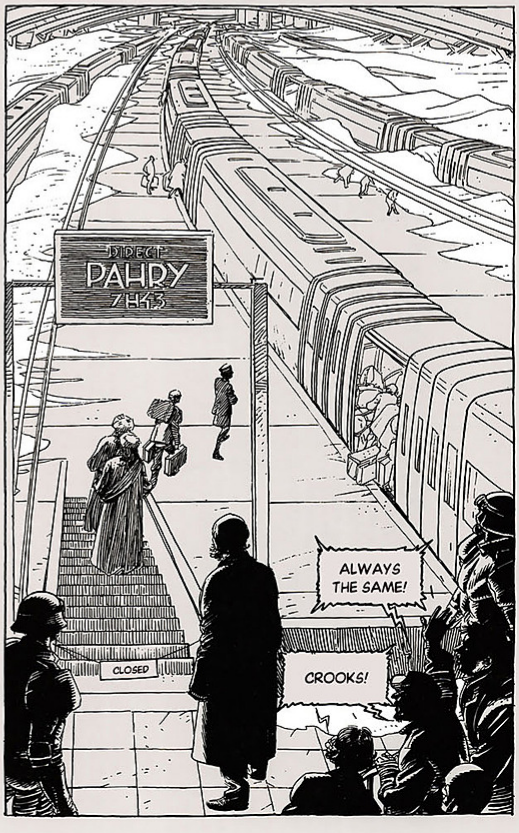

I'M NOT IN THE JOKING MOOD. THIS DEVICE COMES FROM BOULACHISTAN, JUST LIKE THE WARRIOR WHO DIED IN BRÜSEL. IT MUST GO BACK TO THE LAND OF THE BUGTI.
THE SOONER WE LEAVE, THE SOONER THE PROBLEMS WILL BE SOLVED.

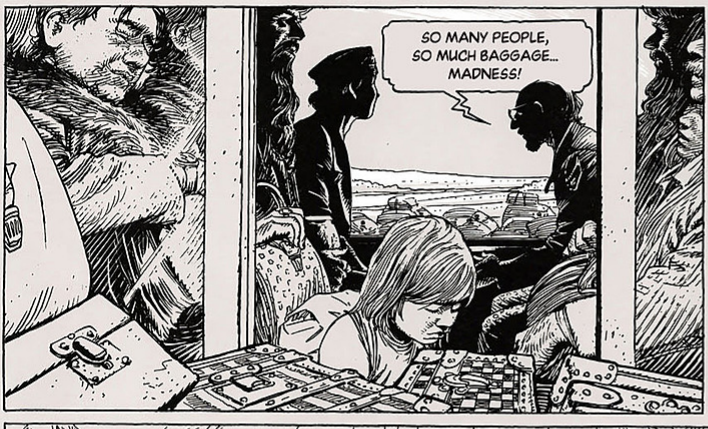

YOU CLAIM THAT EVERYTHING WILL MIRACULOUSLY GET BETTER AS SOON AS YOU'RE IN THE TRAIN?

NO, THE PRODUCTS WILL STAY. THE SAND AND THE STONES WON'T MAGICALLY VANISH., BUT I THINK THINGS WILL CALM DOWN.


THAT'S THE CRAZIEST THING I'VE EVER HEARD. BUT I'VE NO CHOICE BUT TO TRUST YOU, MADAME EXPERT IN UNEXPLAINED PHENOMENA.

HERE ARE THE TICKETS, MARY. YOU'RE IN LUCK, THIS IS THE LAST TRAIN FROM BRÜSEL.
THANK YOU, EDUARD.


DIRECT
PAHRY
ALWAYS THE SAME!
CLOSED
CROOKS!

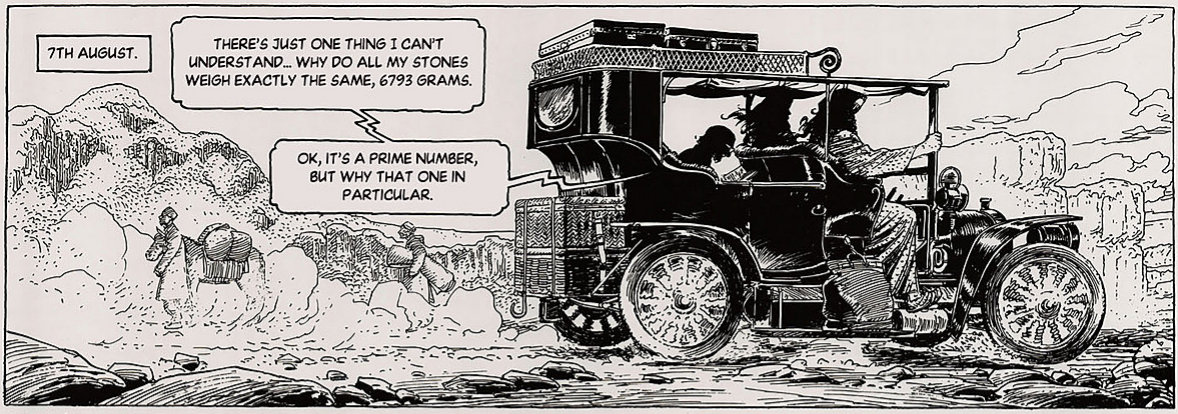

SO MANY PEOPLE, SO MUCH BAGGAGE... MADNESS!

THEY'RE DOING EVERYTHING THEY CAN TO GET AWAY. AND RIGHT NOW THEY SHOULD BE STAYING PUT.

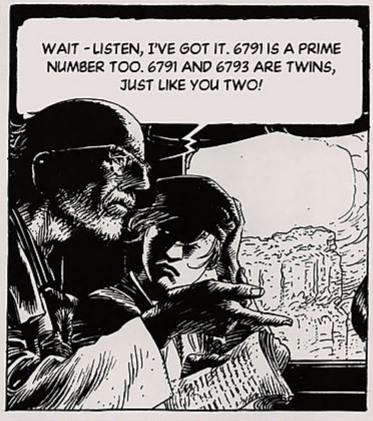
YOUR COUNTRY SOUNDS FASCINATING. I CAN HARDLY WAIT TO GET THERE.
6TH AUGUST

UNBELIEVABLE, THAT I KNEW SO LITTLE OF YOUR CULTURE.

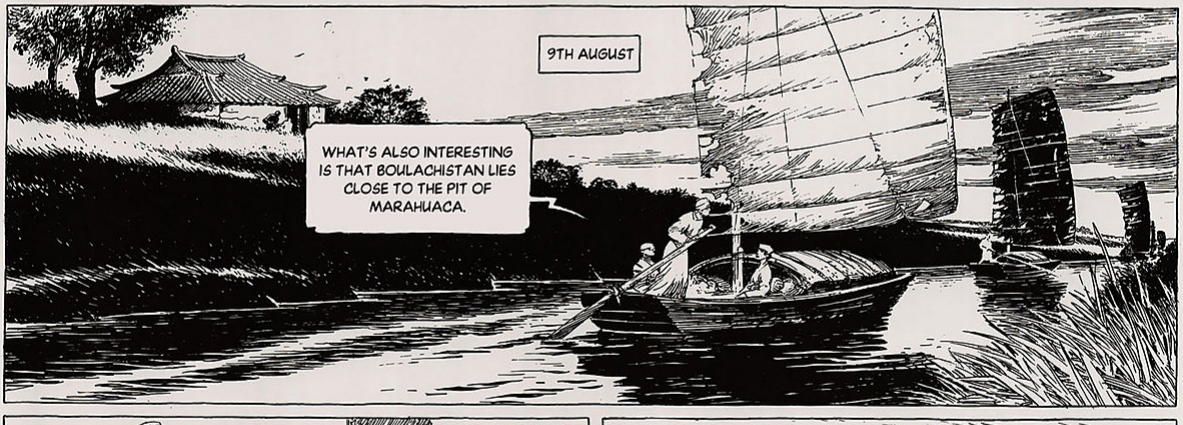
NO-ONE KNOWS BOULACHISTAN.
AND BOULACHISTAN NEEDS NO-ONE.
EVERYTHING MUST BE PUT IN ITS RIGHT PLACE.


7TH AUGUST.
THERE'S JUST ONE THING I CAN'T UNDERSTAND... WHY DO ALL MY STONES WEIGH EXACTLY THE SAME, 6793 GRAMS.
OK, IT'S A PRIME NUMBER, BUT WHY THAT ONE IN PARTICULAR.

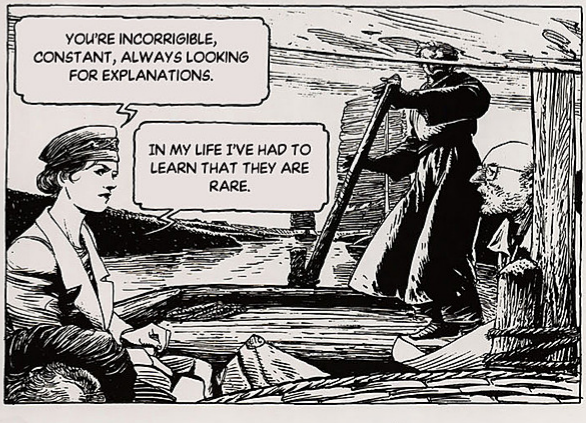
I WISH THAT WAS THE ONLY UNANSWERED QUESTION.


WAIT - LISTEN, I'VE GOT IT. 6791 IS A PRIME NUMBER TOO. 6791 AND 6793 ARE TWINS, JUST LIKE YOU TWO!

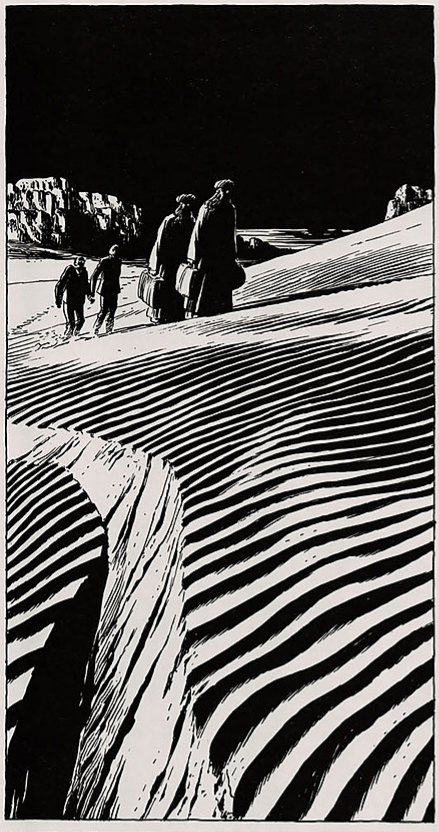
9.6.


9TH AUGUST
WHAT'S ALSO INTERESTING IS THAT BOULACHISTAN LIES CLOSE TO THE PIT OF MARAHUACA.

THAT WAS WHERE THE FAMOUS SPHERES WERE FOUND, YOU KNOW... AND THE NAWABY IS A HEMISPHERE! THERE MUST BE SOME CONNECTION.


YOU'RE INCORRIGIBLE, CONSTANT, ALWAYS LOOKING FOR EXPLANATIONS.
IN MY LIFE I'VE HAD TO LEARN THAT THEY ARE RARE.

10TH AUGUST
IF MY INFORMATION IS CORRECT, THIS RIVER MARKS THE BORDER BETWEEN BUGTI AND MOKTAR LAND.
CAREFUL, YOU MUSTN'T BE SEEN.
YOU ABOVE ALL, MADAME MARY.
NO PROBLEM, I'M USED TO HIDING.
UH... ALL THOSE BOATS, ARE THEY...
YES, THERE WAS MUCH FIGHTING HERE. A DANGEROUS PLACE.
THERE, THE FORTRESS.
NOW WE BEGIN THE REAL JOURNEY.

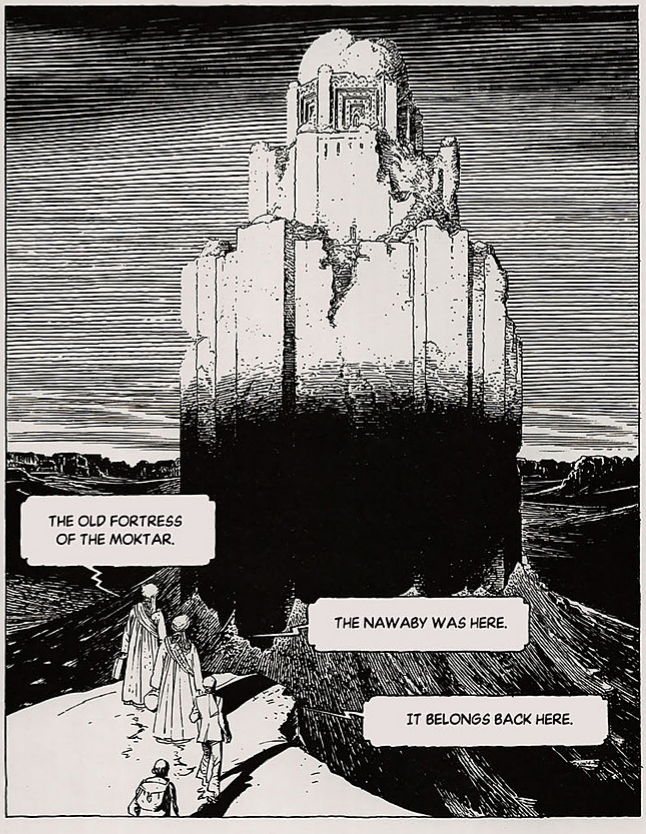


CAREFUL, THE GROUND CAN EASILY GIVE WAY.
FISSURES CAN OPEN ANYWHERE.

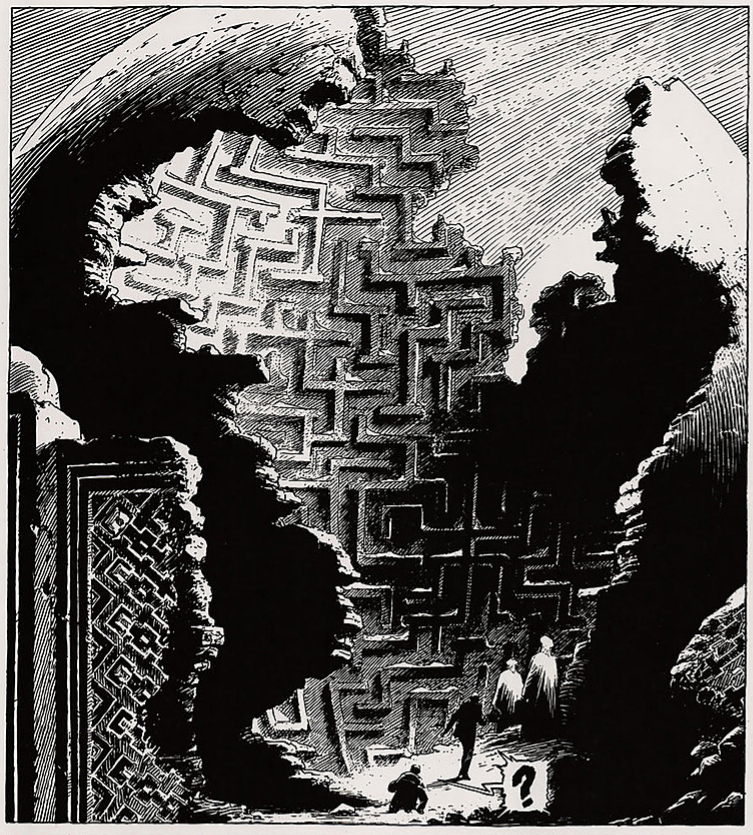
DO YOU SEE WHAT HAS BECOME OF OUR LAND?
I THINK IT'S LOVELY. IF ONLY IT WASN'T SO HOT...

THE LANDSCAPE WAS UNIQUE.
A MAGNIFICENT, MAGICAL WORLD.

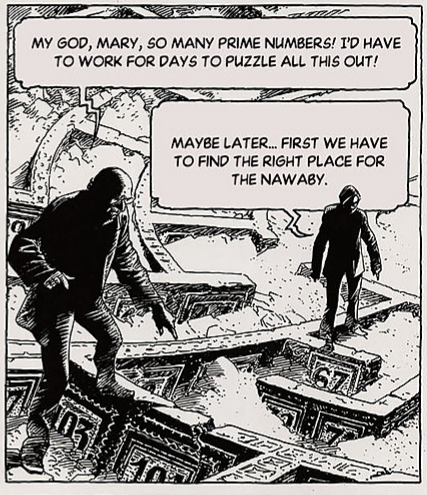
WHO WOULD HAVE THOUGHT IT WOULD BE SO FAR? WHY DON'T WE HAVE ANY CAMELS?
WE'RE ALMOST THERE, CONSTANT.

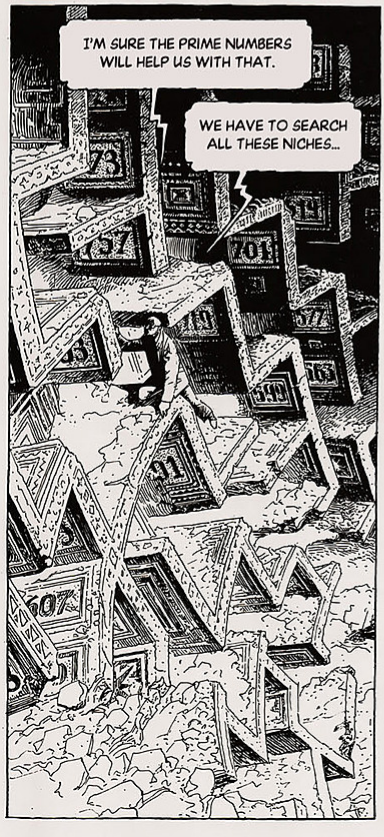

THE OLD FORTRESS OF THE MOKTAR.
THE NAWABY WAS HERE.
IT BELONGS BACK HERE.

FATHER MUST HAVE GONE THAT WAY.
WE'VE NEVER COME THIS FAR.
WHAT IS THAT?
THE ARSENAL OF THE MOKTAR.
THIS IS ALL FROM BRÜSEL!
BRÜSEL
WELL, ANOTHER GLORIOUS CHAPTER IN YOUR HISTORY, CONSTANT...
... SO TO SPEAK.
WE'LL NEVER GET UP THERE. IT'S FAR TOO DANGEROUS.
WE CAN'T GIVE UP NOW, CONSTANT!
CAREFULLY, IT COULD COLLAPSE AT ANY MOMENT!
THAT'S JUST WHAT I'VE BEEN SAYING!
!
!


?

I'M SO GLAD I CAME! WHAT AN EXTRAORDINARY LABYRINTH OF SIGNS AND SYMBOLS!
THAT'S PERKED YOU UP, HASN'T IT?


MY GOD, MARY, SO MANY PRIME NUMBERS! I'D HAVE TO WORK FOR DAYS TO PUZZLE ALL THIS OUT!
MAYBE LATER... FIRST WE HAVE TO FIND THE RIGHT PLACE FOR THE NAWABY.

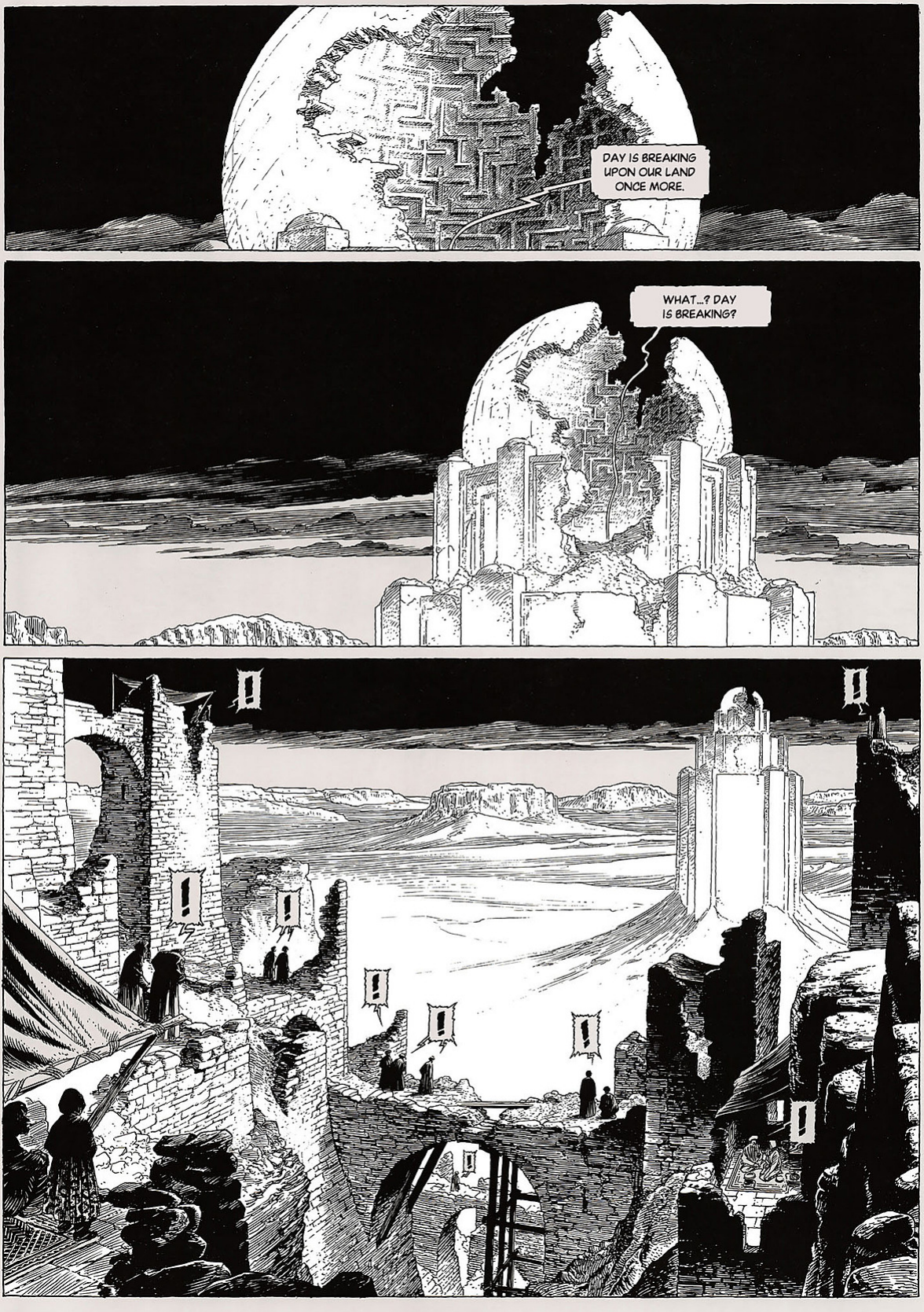

I'M SURE THE PRIME NUMBERS WILL HELP US WITH THAT.
WE HAVE TO SEARCH ALL THESE NICHES...

I DON'T THINK THAT'S THE RIGHT WAY...

I'D RATHER FOLLOW OUR ESCORTS.

IT MUST GO THERE!
?

OF COURSE! YOU'RE RIGHT.
IT SHOULD FIT PERFECTLY.
IT DOESN'T LOOK LIKE IT.
STRANGE, I COULD HAVE SWORN...
THEY UNDERSTAND NOTHING.
THEY'RE DOING IT COMPLETELY WRONG.
I THINK YOU NEED TO TURN IT ROUND, CONSTANT.
TURN IT ROUND...?
?
KLACK
!
!
!
THERE WE GO!
?
FINALLY!


DAY IS BREAKING UPON OUR LAND ONCE MORE.
WHAT...? DAY IS BREAKING?

AND YOU, CONSTANT, WILL YOU RETURN TO BRÜSEL?
I'LL STAY HERE FOR A LITTLE WHILE. I WON'T MISS ANYTHING IN BRÜSEL OR ELSEWHERE, BUT THERE'S SO MUCH TO EXPLORE HERE.
IF AKBAR AND KEHAR WILL ALLOW IT.
YOU BROUGHT THE NAWABY BACK. YOU ARE WELCOME HERE.
AS LONG AS YOU LIKE.
THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP, CONSTANT, YOU PLAYED AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN ALL THIS.
YOU THINK? I GOT THE IMPRESSION THAT I DIDN'T SEE ANYTHING... NOT EVEN THE AURA...
BUT YOU SAW PLENTY OF OTHER THINGS.
HERE'S A LITTLE MEMENTO OF OUR ADVENTURE.
THANK YOU, MARY.
SEE YOU SOON, CONSTANT. A GRAIN OF SAND IS ENOUGH TO MAKE OUR PATHS CROSS AGAIN.
TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF!

IT'S SO QUIET ALL OF A SUDDEN... EVEN THE WIND HAS STOPPED.

OUR VILLAGE IS OVER THERE.
I BET THAT THINGS HAVE CALMED DOWN IN BRÜSEL TOO.

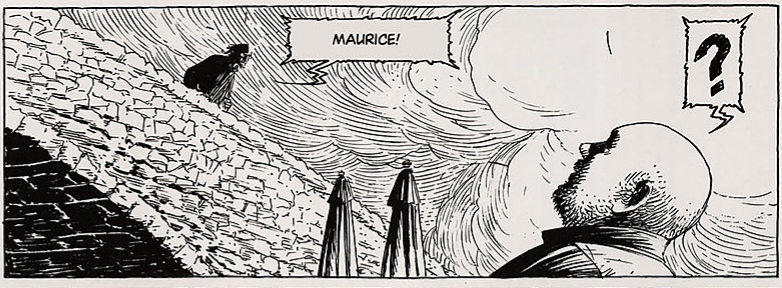
IT WILL TAKE YEARS FOR THE EARTH'S WOUNDS TO HEAL.
AND MUCH TOIL TO BIND THEM.

THEY'RE NOT WASTING ANY TIME, THEY'RE GETTING STARTED RIGHT AWAY!

RIGHT, GENTLEMEN, MY JOB HERE IS DONE. NOW I MUST RETURN TO PAHRY AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE.

EPILOGUE
BRÜSEL
26TH APRIL 785
VISITEZ BRÜSEL
LA CITÉ DE L'ÉTRANGE!
IT DOES DO ME GOOD TO BE BACK IN BRÜSEL ONCE AGAIN.
WITH MY STONES.

!


MAURICE!
?

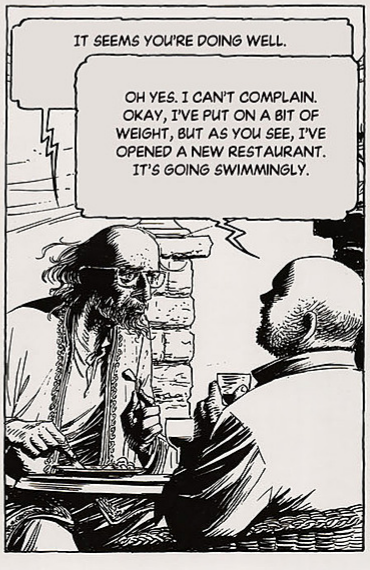
CONSTANT! I DON'T BELIEVE IT!
YUP, HERE I AM.

I'M SO GLAD TO SEE YOU! I MISSED YOU SO MUCH!

WE DIDN'T KNOW IF WE'D SEE YOU AGAIN. YOU WERE GONE SO LONG...
THAT'S RIGHT. I DID TAKE MY TIME SEEING BOULACHISTAN.

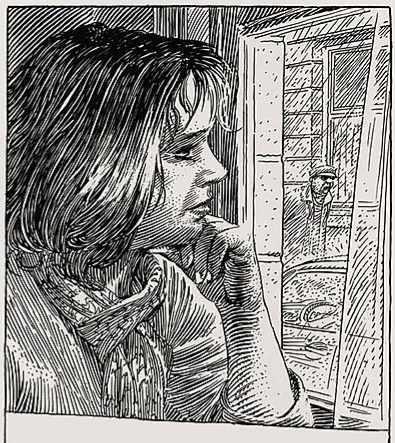
IT WAS AWFUL, NO-ONE BELIEVES ME WHEN I TELL THEM WHAT I WENT THROUGH.
ALL KINDS OF THINGS HAVE HAPPENED HERE TOO. BUT FIRST, TAKE A SEAT, YOU MUST BE HUNGRY.

A MENU FOR MY FRIEND CONSTANT!


IT SEEMS YOU'RE DOING WELL.
OH YES. I CAN'T COMPLAIN. OKAY, I'VE PUT ON A BIT OF WEIGHT, BUT AS YOU SEE, I'VE OPENED A NEW RESTAURANT. IT'S GOING SWIMMINGLY.

THEY CALL IT LIGHT, AIRY CUISINE, I'M ALMOST CERTAIN TO GET A STAR.
I'M HAPPY FOR YOU.

TELL ME, THOSE CHILDREN THERE, ARE THEY...
YES, KRISTIN ANTIPOVA'S.
SHE'S DOING MUCH BETTER. A REALLY MIRACULOUS RECOVERY. SHE'S EVEN LEADING TOURS, SHOWING THE TOURISTS WHERE HER HOUSE WAS, WHERE THE SAND FIRST APPEARED, AND IN THE EVENINGS SHE HELPS ME IN THE RESTAURANT.
THEY'RE GOOD KIDS, I'M CONSIDERING ADOPTING THEM...
YOU DON'T SAY...
YES, A LOT HAS CHANGED HERE! MAYOR SLEECKX WAS CELEBRATED AS A HERO, AS IF HE'D FIXED EVERYTHING. HE'S SURE TO BE VOTED IN FOR A SEVENTH TERM,
AND OF COURSE, NO-ONE KNOWS MARY'S NAME.
SLEECKX LEAST OF ALL, OF COURSE.
AND GUESS WHO ELSE I JUST GOT NEWS FROM.
GO ON.
FROM ELSA! SHE WROTE ME A MYSTERIOUS LETTER... NO STAMP OR ANYTHING. BUT WHAT IT SAYS IS EVEN CRAZIER.
HERE, READ IT.



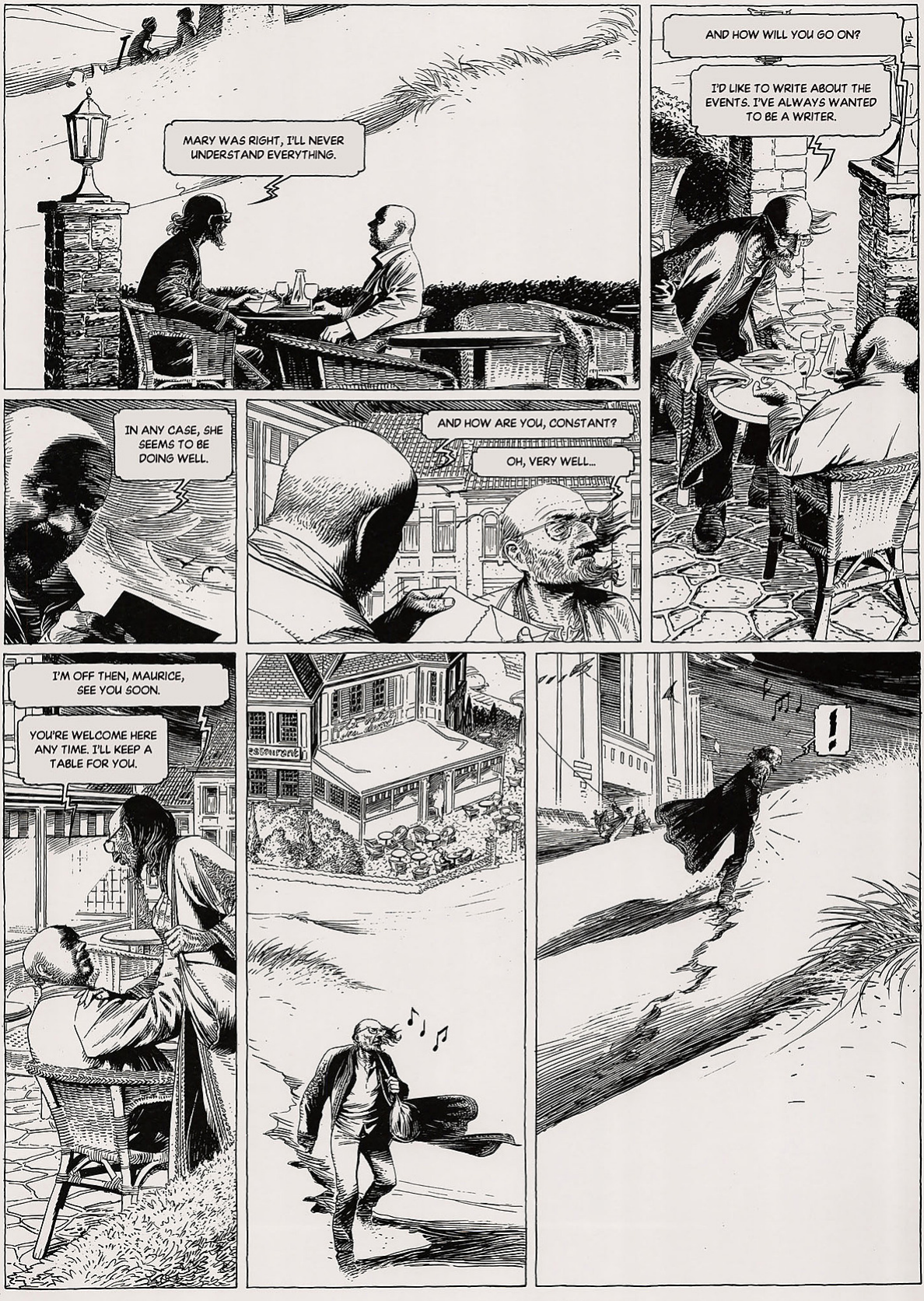
Dear Maurice,

Over a month ago, I left Brüsel. I don't quite understand it myself. I'm in a city that looks very similar but is also very different. It's called Brussels. Yes. Brussels. Much else is different too. For example, the date. It's the year 2004 here.
The Autrique House

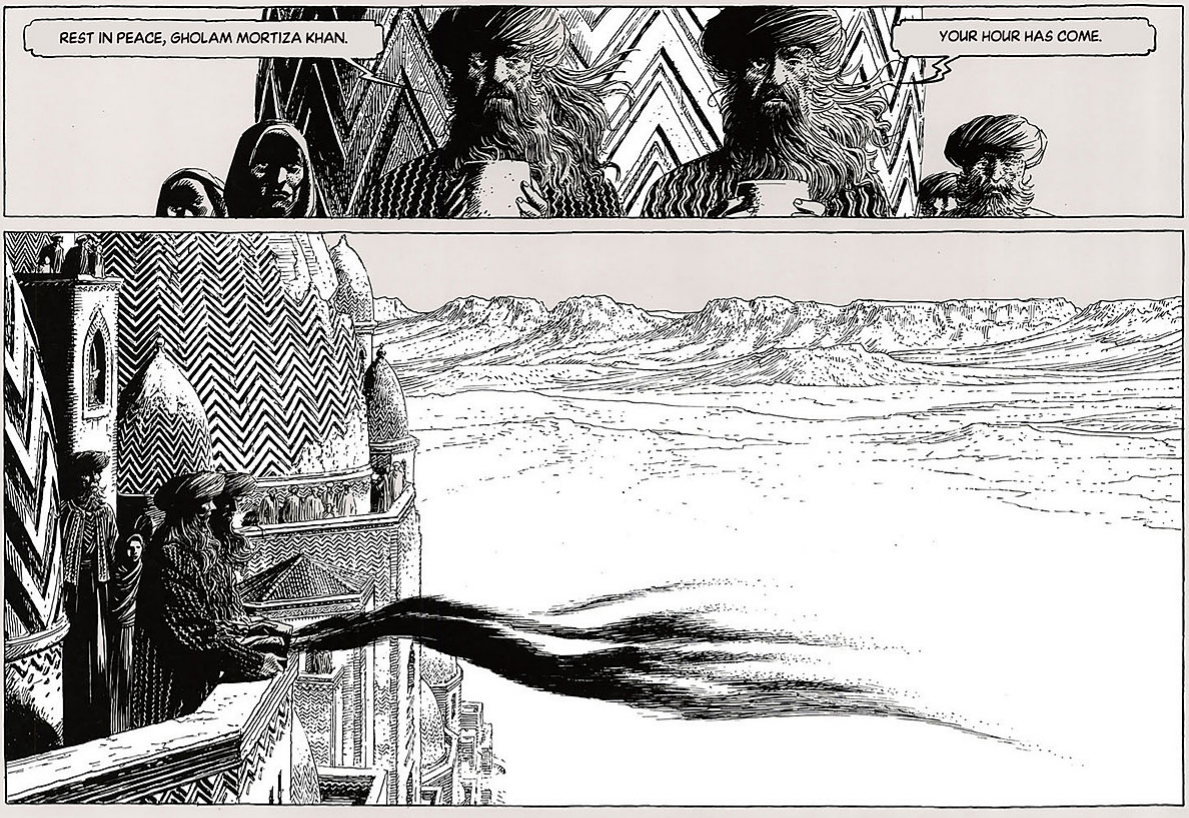
I feel better than ever. I feel freer, happier. As if I've finally found my right place. I hope everything is well on 'your side'. I don't know if I'll ever see you again.

Your loyal friend,

Elsa Autrique


MARY WAS RIGHT, I'LL NEVER UNDERSTAND EVERYTHING.
AND HOW WILL YOU GO ON?
I'D LIKE TO WRITE ABOUT THE EVENTS. I'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO BE A WRITER.
IN ANY CASE, SHE SEEMS TO BE DOING WELL.
AND HOW ARE YOU, CONSTANT?
OH, VERY WELL...
I'M OFF THEN, MAURICE, SEE YOU SOON.
YOU'RE WELCOME HERE ANY TIME. I'LL KEEP A TABLE FOR YOU.
restaurant
!

I'D ALMOST FORGOTTEN MARY'S MEMENTO...
INCREDIBLE!
SHE SAW THE TRUTH... HER ALONE, NONE OF US...
!
HEY!
HOW COULD I?
AH, DOESN'T MATTER...



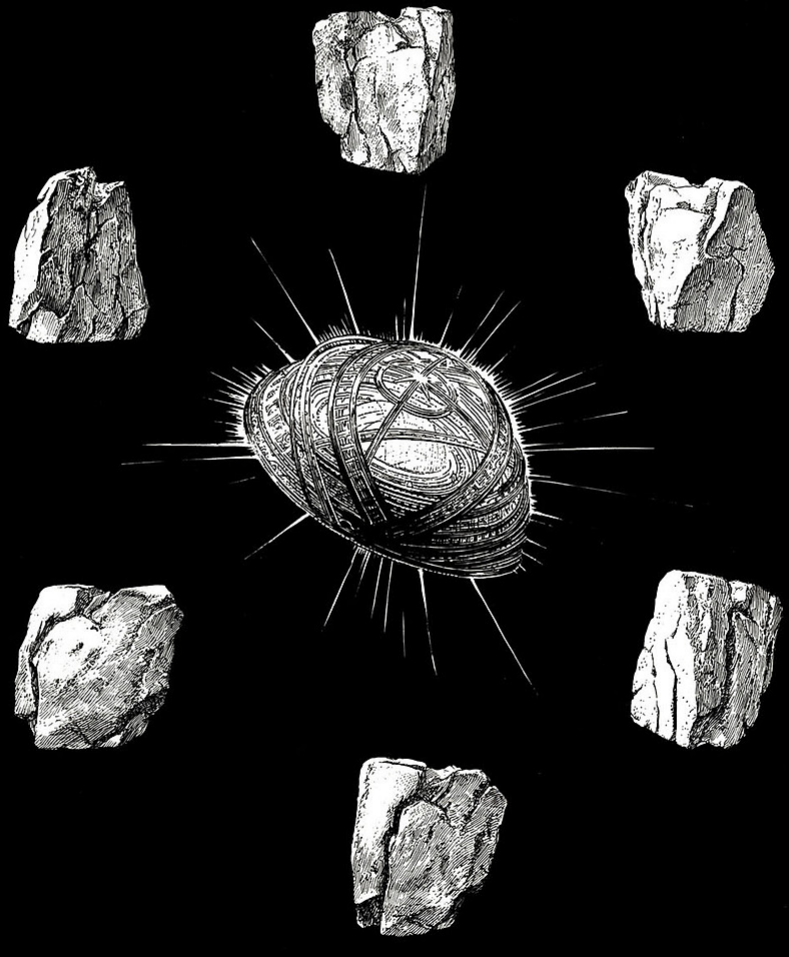

STORY AND TEXT: B. PEETERS

STORY AND ART: F. SCHUITEN

In Brüsel the world is coming apart at the seams. In an apartment building, stones are appearing out of thin air, all with exactly the same weight, a prime number at that. Meanwhile, the gourmet chef Maurice keeps getting lighter no matter what he eats, and is threatening to float off.

The city fathers don't know what to do and ask Mary von Rathen, former Leaning Girl and current expert in unexplained phenomena, for advice. In fact, Mary is the only one who can really see what is going on...

Another fantastical philosophical episode from the world of The Obscure Cities.



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